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GAME PLAYERS PC Entertainment™

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Ultima Underworld II
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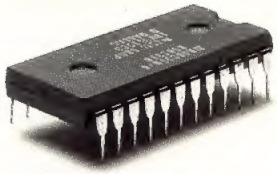

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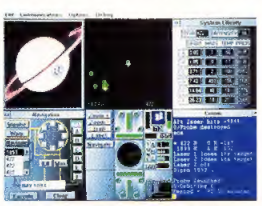

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EDITOR'S NOTES

This is one of the busiest times of the year for all of us at *PC Entertainment*. For starters, we just returned from the Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Judging from the number and variety of upcoming releases we saw on display during our four days in Vegas, 1993 promises to hold plenty of excitement for anyone interested in entertainment software. Our extensive report from Winter CES on page 37 will bring you up to date on all the releases you can look for in the coming months.

One thing we're certain to see down the road is a steadily increasing number of "edutainment" titles. Over the past 18 months, the educational software market has experienced a surprising growth spurt, which in turn has led to game-oriented publishers trying their hand at educational software. Electronic Arts, the world's largest entertainment software publisher, is ready to debut EA*KIDS, a line of educational software developed with the assistance of experienced teachers and education specialists. Lance Elko visited Electronic Arts to get an early look at EA*KIDS, and was very impressed with the attention and care that EA has devoted to this new line. You'll want to check out his story on page 16.

While it's easy to get carried away looking forward to new products, our 3rd Annual *PC Entertainment* Awards are a reminder that 1992 was truly a remarkable year for PC gaming. We saw dozens and dozens of outstanding games last year, making our task of picking the year's best more difficult than it's ever been. Turn to page 18 to find out which titles we felt deserved the title "Best of '92."

Beginning with this issue, all reviews will carry a 0 to 5 rating. The range reflects our collective judgement on a product, with a 0 being a complete flop and a 5 representing perfection. We're also giving credit where credit is due by naming each game's developers up front, along with the rating and publisher. In addition, we've eliminated the hardware requirements box previously found at the end of each review. Most games have the same minimum requirements (640K RAM, VGA, AdLib or Sound Blaster support, and mouse support), and we felt the space could be better used for more text and pictures — the type of info you need to decide whether or not a product is right for you.

Stephen Poole
Editor

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Product Information Number 266

FOR KIDS ONLY

id Pictures, a new add-on package for **Davidson**'s *Kid Works 2* and **Broderbund**'s *Kid Pix*, was recently released by **Davidson**. *Kid Pictures* adds six new activities: dot-to-dot, a coloring book, paint-by number, math mazes, mystery pictures (shapes and colors), and a picture gallery (for printing or personalizing).

Kid Pictures was developed by L.A.-based **Creative Pursuits**, the newest member of Davidson's affiliate-label program. The product carries a suggested retail price of $29.95.

LARS Design, a furniture company based in Denver, has created The CompuColor Collection, a line of computer furniture designed especially for children aged 2 to 12. These downsized computer study-

The CompuColor Collection

stations have no sharp corners or hinges which can be hazardous for small children, and feature a built-in surge suppressor, as well as a reversible "V top" that gives left- or right-handed kids a comfortable armrest. Available in a variety of colors and finishes, the CompuColor Collection will be sold through specialty stores and high-end mail order for $299.

NEW CONTROLLER FOR SIM FANS

The G-Force Flight Yoke, a new product designed to give gamers more control over various types of vehicles used in simulations, was recently announced by **Suncom Technologies**. G-Force can be used as a pivoting flight yoke as well as fixed-column steering wheel, and its features include dual mounting capabilities (rubber suction cups for non-skid desktop mounting or clamps for fixing to the edge of a desktop), dual fire buttons (trigger finger and thumbtip fire buttons located on each yoke handle), and switchable fire buttons.

The G-Force Yoke has a suggested retail price of $89.99.

Suncom has also introduced two other controllers: the FX 2000 joystick and the Command Control, a hand-held control pad. The FX 2000 features switchable fire buttons, throttle control, an adjustable grip for left- or right-handed players, and on-command Auto-Fire. The Command Control, larger than a video-game control pad but similar in design, features five fire buttons with independent and simultaneous A and B Auto-Fire, and high definition digital to analog control for full 360-degree control.

The FX 2000 comes with a two-year warranty, and will retail for $39.99. The Command Control will carry a $29.99 suggested retail price.

UPGRADES FROM R.A.W.

A.W. Entertainment has announced that new shipments of *Spoils of War* will include a Map Editor, which will allow the player to create new maps and scenarios. Players who own earlier versions of *Spoils* can receive the Map Editor free of charge by sending a self-addressed disk mailer directly to R.A.W. Entertainment.

Also announced by R.A.W. was a Construction Kit for new shipments of *Fireteam 2000*. The Construction Kit includes six new scenarios, a Scenario Analysis utility, three new terrain types, and load and save functions for both maps and scenarios. Players who already own *Fireteam 2000* may receive the upgraded version by sending their original *Fireteam* disks to R.A.W., along with $12 to cover shipping and handling.

NEW FOR WINDOWS

Puzzle games and brain-teasers are perfect for Windows. So it's no surprise that **Epyx** has converted *Getaway*, a collection of six games released just over a year ago for laptops, to run under Windows.

The collection includes old standards such as Dominoes and Solitaire, along with four other games: Cascade, Word Salad, Stuffin' the Briefcase, and Totem.

Cascade is a cross between *Tetris* and Yahtzee, while Totem is based on the board game Mastermind. Word Salad challenges you to form words from a grid of letters, and Stuffin' the Briefcase is a jigsaw puzzle in which you pack for a trip.

Getaways features digitized sound effects high-res graphics, and is available for $39.95

DO YOU SWING?

Golf-sim fans know that clicking on a power meter doesn't come close to duplicating the mechanics of a real-life golf swing. But the introduction of the Pro Swing System from **Sports Sciences Inc.** could radically change the way people play golf on their PCs. The Pro Swing System consists of a 26" golf club and a sensor unit which sits on the floor. As you swing the club over the sensor, a light is projected from the club onto the sensor, which then reads the movement of the light to determine tempo, path, club-facing, and contact. LED displays indicates stroke distance and one of nine different ball paths. The Pro Swing club has been designed to simulate as closely as possible the grip, feel, and dynamics of a fully extended club.

The Pro Swing System

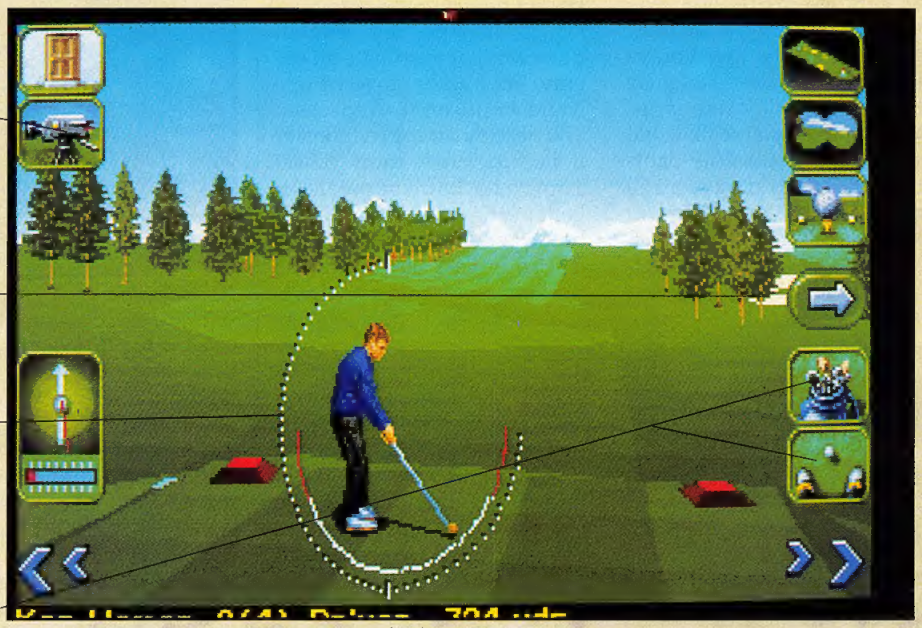
Access Software has modified its award-winning *Links* software to support the Pro Swing System in order to graphically display the result of your swing. The *Country Club Golf Game* features six championship courses, a driving range, and a putting green.

The Pro Swing System retails for $299, while the *Country Club Golf Game* will be sold separately for $99.

If it played any faster it'd be a flight simulator.

Tired of slow play? Well, there's no waiting around with Greens' instant screen redraw. Spectacular 256 color 3-D graphics set you up for your next shot as soon as the ball stops rolling.

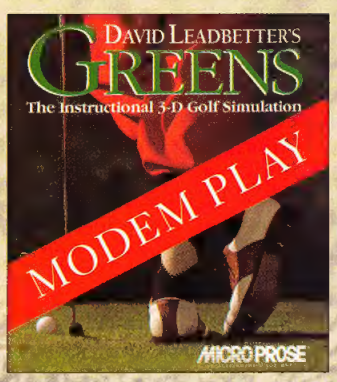
- MORE FUN– What a view! Watch your shots from every possible camera angle with your choice of seven unique vantage points!
- MORE COMPETITION– With Greens' modem play capabilities, you can compete against a friend in any of a dozen different types of games! Greens also has the risks of the real game. Sand traps and water hazards are poised to swallow your golf balls on six challenging courses.
- MORE REALISM– You haven't experienced realism in a computer golf simulation until you've witnessed Greens' incredibly accurate ball flight and swing dynamics.
- MORE OPTIONS– Club selection is just the beginning of Greens' many options. You can adjust stance, swing, tee, and ball positions...and see their effect on your shots before, during, and after each stroke. Your player profile and handicap will even change over time so you can improve your game.



Actual screens may vary.

"While all [Greens, Links 386 Pro, PGA Tour for Windows and Jack Nicklaus Sig. Ed] performed admirably, David Leadbetter's Greens just couldn't be matched for sheer enjoyment."

PC Review Nov. 1992



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MAGIC POCKETS

Okay kid, listen up. You've got pants pockets that you just can't fill, no matter how you stuff them. Pretty cool, huh? But when all the toys you've stowed disappear — stolen by the grumpy denizens of Pocketland — you realize that you'll have to turn the pants inside out and go on a microverse safari to recover them.

In *Magic Pockets*, developed by the **Bitmap Brothers** and published by **Konami**,

you'll do more than run and spin. With all the trinkets to collect, potions to drink, and powers to practice, the game never feels quite the same from one level to the next.

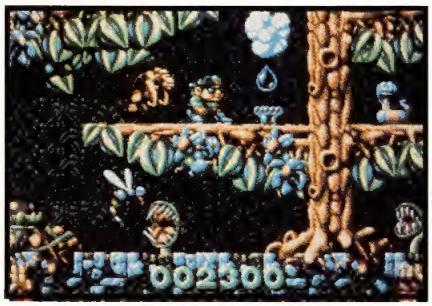
Press the space bar or joystick button to summon the pocket power of the day, anything from minitornadoes to little fluffy clouds to freezing snowballs. But there's more to *Magic Pockets* than mindless shooting. As the Bitmap Kid (a.k.a. BK), you'll amble your way through some very tough decisions. To leap without looking or to send down a volley of whirlwinds — that's the question. Fall far enough and BK spins, taking out all sorts of colorful baddies. BK's invulnerable while spinning, but spins don't last long, so have a pocket power at the ready.

A low-energy pocket power might terminate an enemy, but a fully powered one could imprison it. And when you destroy a trapped monster it becomes a yummy Sweet Thing, chock-full of points or, better yet, a special item: a milk bottle good for an extra life, or a cup of java that flips BK's pocket powers into overdrive.

Pocket powers change as you progress through the 26 levels, reflecting the newest world you have to conquer: snowballs in the mountains, clouds in the jungle, etc. These pocket powers behave differently in each stage, sometimes bouncing along the ground, sometimes speeding directly toward a foe. The critters you encounter are cute but deadly, well-drawn and distinctive — just the sort of graphics we've come to expect from the Bitmap Brothers.

Magic Pockets is yet another success for the Bitmap Brothers. The undisputed kings or arcade-style action for the PC have created a platform game that appeals to the kid in us all.

— David Sears



SHERLOCK HOLMES, CONSULTING DETECTIVE VOLUME II

ICOM's *Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective* was the first "gee-whiz-look-what-you-can-do-on-CD-ROM!" game to hit the market. Not only was it one of the only entertainment products for this new medium, but it was also bundled with many CD-ROM units. By 1991 standards, the 15-frames-per-second video and digitized voice was cutting edge. Unfortunately, not much has been done to improve things in *Volume II*, and many of the problems of the first game are even more pronounced the second time out.

Based on the popular paper game from Sleuth and authorized by the Conan Doyle estate, *Volume II* features three mysteries which must be solved by traveling around London speaking to suspects and experts, all of whom are portrayed in video clips lasting anywhere from 30 seconds to two minutes. The solid cast, attractive sets and costumes, and capable direction put these scenes on par with an average episode of PBS's "Mystery" series. There are a few hammy performances, but on the whole these scenes are very well-done and, aside from some poor sound mixing and the less-than-full-motion video, are entertaining and convincing.

Each of the three mysteries (The Two Lions, The Pilfered Paintings, and The Murdered Munitions Magnate) are intriguing but only moderately challenging. Using Holmes's phone book to trigger "interrogations" of the various witnesses and suspects, clues begin to emerge, more names enter the notebook, and the pieces of the case begin to fall into place.

Each action you perform costs "points," with the goal being to use as few points as Holmes did to solve the case. All this is very passive: nowhere can the gamer ask a suspect a question, so basically you simply trigger the scenes and note their contents. What's most frustrating is knowing the solution, but not being allowed into the Court sequence to finger the culprit. Frequently I tried to trigger the endgame, only to be told I needed to visit more places — but after doing so I was told I'd visited *too* many places and used more points than Holmes.

I finished all three mysteries in six hours — a fairly enjoyable six hours, but not worth the $70 asking price. Of course, I could have played the game again in order to better my score, but who wants to play a mystery game to which you know the solution? Electronic Arts' *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes*, though lacking the whiz-bang video of *Consulting Detective*, offers much more game for the money.

— T. Liam MacDonald

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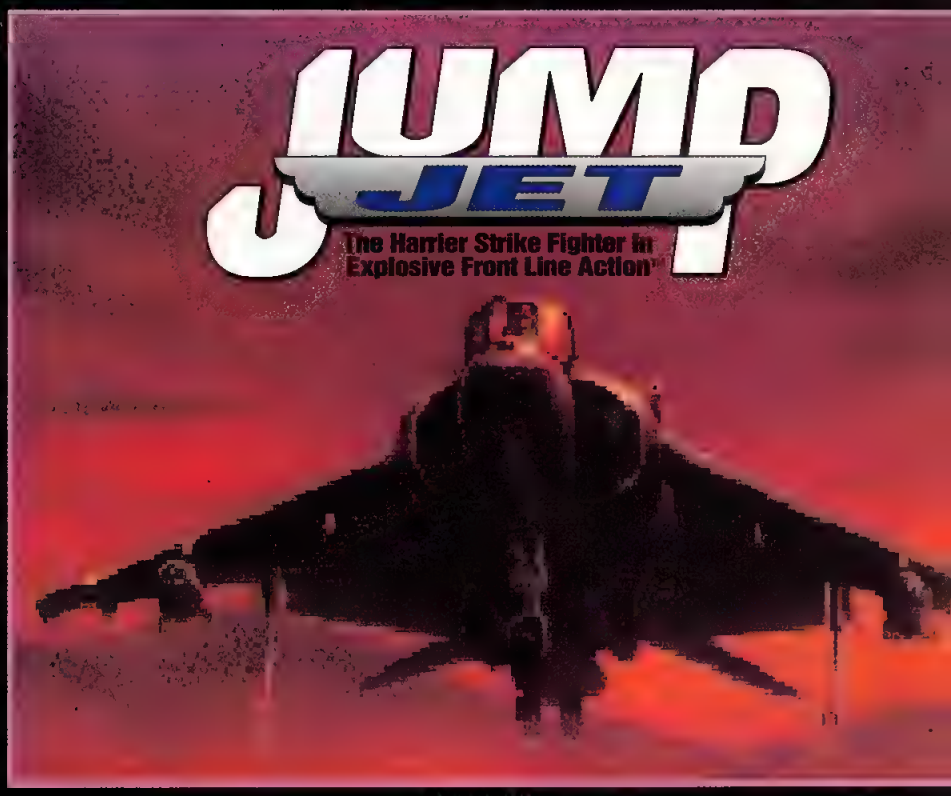

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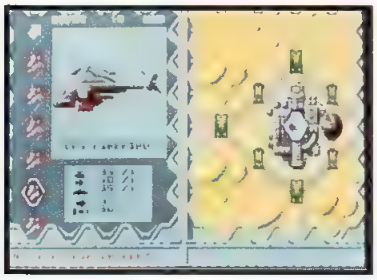
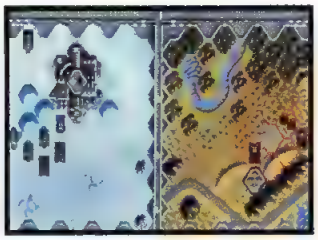
BATTLE ISLE SCENARIO DISK VOLUME ONE

Part of the attraction of **UbiSoft**'s *Battle Isle* is that it's a snap to learn and highly replayable. Though this small-scale futuristic war game is couched in a needlessly complex sci-fi storyline, the game proper is pure tactics. High-tech air, land, and sea forces compete on fairly small battlefields, each trying to nab the other's HQ. You can play either one- or two-player games on 32 maps (16 for each mode), but there's little variety in the terrain. That's been corrected — with a vengeance — by *Scenario Disk Volume One*.

Though titled *Volume One*, this is the only add-on disk planned by UbiSoft and **Blue Byte**, developers of *Battle Isle*. 25 new solo and 9 new two-player maps are included, mixing up the terrain and forces just enough to keep the recipe interesting and challenging. Once you're past one of the worst installation procedures in recent memory — the old and new maps cannot be kept on the hard drive at the same time, but must be compressed and decompressed with a batch file — it's all smooth sailing. Aside from a new background screen, there are no changes in the interface.





Going to geological extremes, the Scenario disk purports to offer both polar and desert landscapes. The new solo maps, however, are almost all desert scenarios, with only three polar scenarios and a couple of mixed maps that include both terrains. The exact effect of these new terrains upon movement and combat is hard to determine, due in no small part to documentation that could generously be described as "sparse." Ice flows sometimes align to form bridges and hinder navel traffic, and the sand generally seems to slow movement of some vehicles. All unit attributes remain the same, though some naval units are now allowed to move in rivers, and some bridges may only be crossed by infantry.

The new terrains may make the game look different, but it's the wide-ranging variety of opposition forces and creative layouts that make this Scenario disk a real standout. There's a healthy combination of small maps offering unique challenges and wide, sprawling maps with numerous objectives. One feature noticeably absent is modem support for the two-player mode, but overall this add-on disk brings new challenges and dimensions to a worthwhile game.

— T. Liam MacDonald

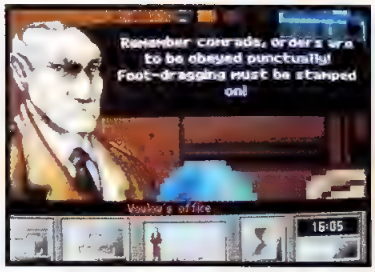
KGB

At a time when it seems as though every new release aspires to redefine the state of computer game design, it's refreshing to run across a product like *KGB* that appears to make the most of the status quo.

This graphic adventure from **Virgin** is very similar in style to Dynamix's *Rise of the Dragon*. In terms of its interface, KGB is almost the twin of *Dragon*, right down to the icon-cursor that changes when you hit a "hot spot" on the screen. But more important is the thematic resemblance between the two games. Like *Rise of the Dragon*, *KGB* is an exercise in computer game noir, a mystery-cum-thriller that immerses you in the seedy underside of society.

In *KGB*, that society is Moscow during the tension-filled days immediately preceding the August 1991 coup attempt. The game casts you in the role of one Maksim Rukov, an intelligence officer ordered to ferret out corruption within the KGB. Your mission requires you to tread carefully wherever you go, for in these times of uncertain loyalties, there's no one you can really trust — not even your superiors, or your own relatives.

In contrast to many graphic adventures, the emphasis in *KGB* is on conversation rather than object manipulation. You talk to characters by clicking on their picture, then selecting from a menu of conversational gambits. The choice of opening lines may range from innocuous observations on the weather to



pointed inquiries about the individual's recent activities. Frequently, a character's comments will lead to another set of possible responses on your part. These exchanges often assume a double-edged quality, though, calculated to play on your growing sense of paranoia. If you strike the wrong attitude or reveal information better kept to yourself, you can derail your investigation — or worse. *KGB* truly treats conversation as a difficult-to-master art.

KGB offers no technological breakthroughs that will have you perched at the edge of your seat in open-eyed amazement, but it does sport the high production values of a Virgin product: handsome graphics, a varied and interesting soundtrack, and bug-free play. And it also holds an unexpected pleasure: it plays quite crisply on even a lowly 286 computer, with only the slightest of delays between screen changes.

— Jeff Seiken

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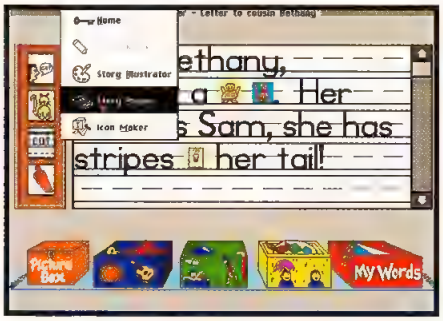
Product Information Number 108

KID WORKS 2

Part word processor, part read-to-me storybook, part art program, and all fun — that's *Kid Works 2* from **Davidson**. This major rewrite of the original *Kid Works* clearly demonstrates the power of disappointed critics, both young users and adult reviewers alike. Davidson took every negative comment to heart and came up with an interesting early writing program aimed at kids ages 4-10.

Kid Works 2 separates writing, art, and playback activities, making it easier to focus on a specific activity without getting distracted by other options. In Story Writer mode, the young author can choose between a very large preschool font and a smaller font that more closely resembles the quality of work expected from 3rd and 4th graders. Either font can be used in combination with over 250 different pictures organized into four discrete boxes — objects, actions, descriptions, and "my words." A text-to-speech option reads back the written text in a mechanical but easy-to-understand voice.

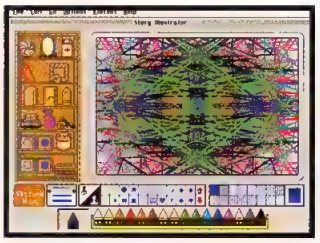


The painting section is surprisingly powerful, particularly for a program intended primarily as a word processor. All the standard tools are provided, but labeled with preschool-oriented icons — far larger than normal, and a bit more familiar to the target audience. For example, a hand vacuum is used to clear the screen, a ruler makes straight lines, and a photo album stores your work. Routines that import images created by Broderbund's *Kid Pix* are also handy.

The art program does have some shortcomings. You can't fill over a pattern, the palette is limited to 16 colors and 16 patterns, and the stamp routine is restricted to three sizes, ranging from very tiny to small: Really big stamped images are out of the question. *Kid Works 2* would be even easier to use if it were possible to move from the art to writing modes without using the adult menu.

But youngsters who love hearing their work read back to them will get a thrill out of the robotic voice, and the combination of art and text is very well-designed and nicely balanced. Overall, *Kid Works 2* is an attractive product, one that offers considerable value for a relatively modest price.

— Leslie Eiser



BRIDGE MASTER

There are a lot of bridge simulations on the market, most on about the same level. All it takes is a little comparison shopping for price and features: One may offer a lot of features, but have elementary graphics; another may have a

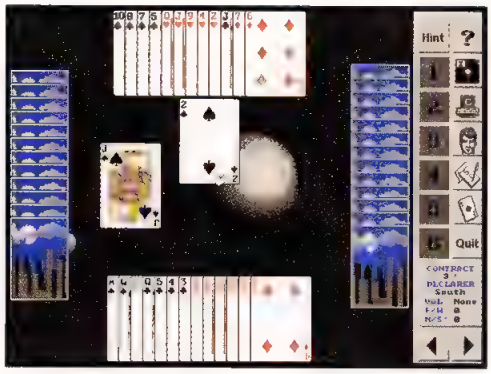
dozen card backs, but provide only basic game play. **Capstone's** new *Bridge Master*, on the other hand, is a cut above most of its competition, offering smooth game play, excellent graphics (particularly in Super VGA mode), and varied play options, many not found in other simulations.

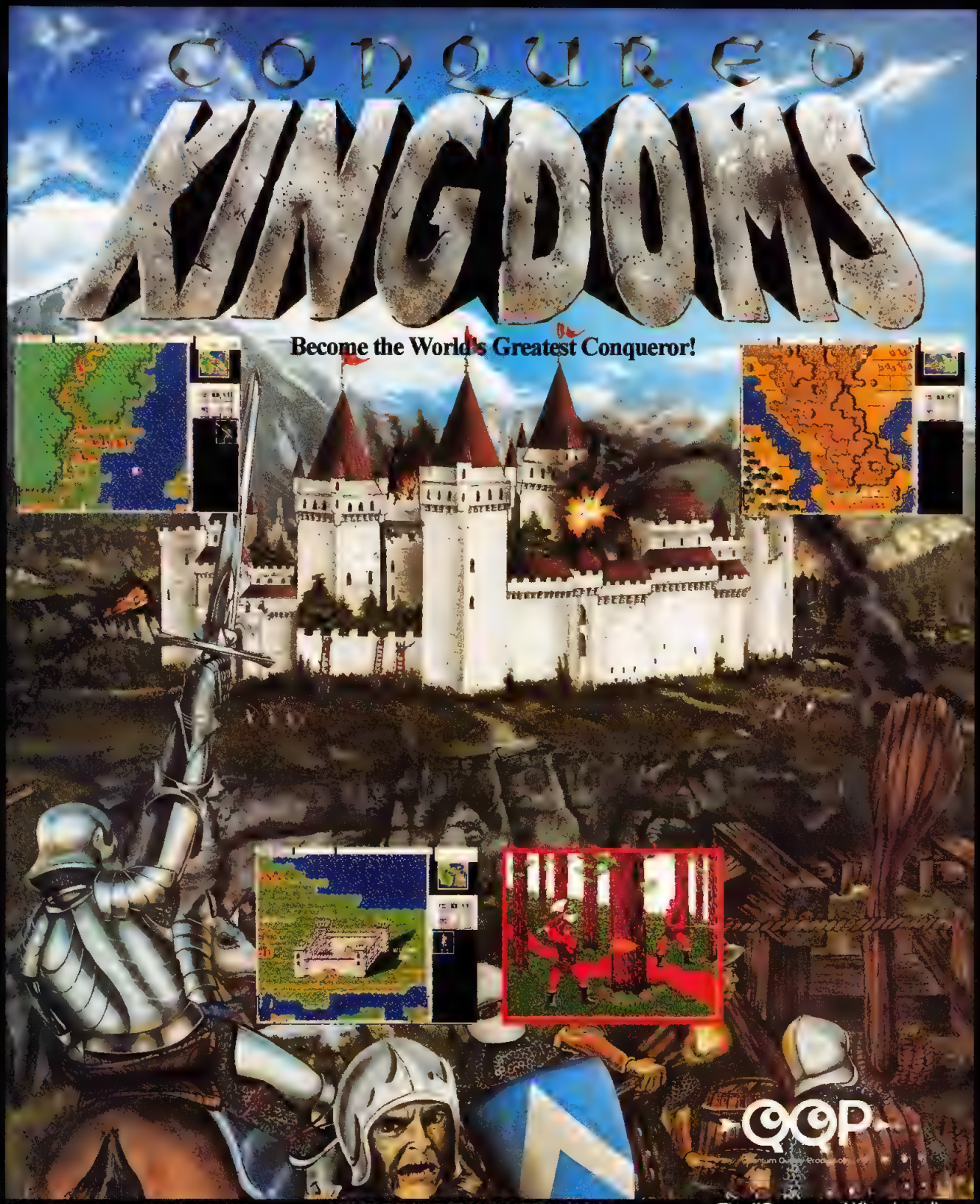
Bridge Master will especially appeal to players with a little experience under their belts. If you've wanted to try Duplicate or Pairs competition without embarrassing yourself in public, here's your chance. Or if you're irritated to no end when your partner starts bidding in the Blackwood convention, you can polish up those skills — or try seven other conventions to turn the tables.

Bridge Master has four skill levels — novice, amateur, average, and pro — so even a beginner can enjoy a competitive game. You can also choose the playing style of your partner and opponents — aggressive or passive, trump-waster or trick-grabber. In addition to full mouse support, there are 28 hot keys to speed along game play, and a menu-driven interface that's easy to use (although the symbols for spades and clubs look too much alike, especially if only one is being bid).

If you can't round up a human to be your partner and the computer partner is bidding erratically (which happens occasionally), you can hook up with other players on a network or with modem-to-modem play. Do you hate playing dummy? You can always play the hand when you've won the bid with *Bridge Master*. Need to work on defensive play? Elect to give your opponents the best hand and try to set them. You can even create any hands you wish, grand slam after grand slam.

— Leslie Mizell





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Product Information Number 265

COBRA MISSION

MegaTech's *Cobra Mission* is a weird combination of the Mitchell brothers and Mario Brothers. Its "hard R" approach to sex makes Leisure Suit Larry seem like a blushing school boy, while its simplistic graphics and role-playing elements would be more at home in a Nintendo game than a PC title.

You play as a private eye returning to his hometown of Cobra. Cobra is divided into sections — Central, North, South, East, and West Cobra. Cobra has been taken over by an evil crime lord, and each of the sections is ruled by a lesser boss. You walk through each area, battling random foes via static RPG-style combat screens, until you've got enough money, weapons, and hit points to take on the boss. There's not much more to it than that.

But while this elemental game play may be easy enough for even young players, *Cobra Mission* isn't something you want falling into a child's hands. Nude women are everywhere in the game. You can buy marital aids in some of the game's shops. The text is full of adult language. And at any time in the game you can visit one of the women you've met and, well, get to know her.

As you roam around, the characters have the squat, playful look of an 8-bit video game, and this is what you'll see most of the time. The game's close-up screens, though, are much better — full-color, hi-res reproductions of some very distinctive enemies. And naked women.

All the sex, nudity, and cursing might be too much (and probably is for many players) if it weren't for the obvious Japanese origins of the game. While much of the overt sex (and sexism) isn't appropriate in our culture, it's standard fare in Japan. In fact, the American version has been toned down! With this in mind, it can be argued that *Cobra Mission* is an entertaining look at an aspect of Japanese culture that's simply a lot different from ours. And as such, no offense is intended — and none should be taken.

Of course, taking the cultural high road won't work for everyone. And some of *Cobra Mission* is troubling no matter how you rationalize it, especially the game's characterization of women. So be warned: *Cobra Mission* can be offensive. But I have to admit I enjoyed it. The dichotomy of adult behavior in a Nintendo-like game is fascinating, and some of the text — especially as the translator attempts bawdy, American-style profanity — is hilarious. *Cobra Mission* certainly isn't for everyone, but it can be very entertaining if you take it the right way.

— *Matt Firme*

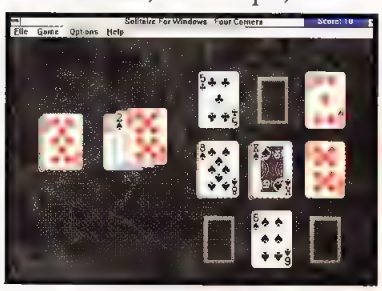
SOLITAIRE FOR WINDOWS

A game this good deserves a better title, something with a little pizazz. *Solitaire for Windows* is too generic a title — it gives no warning as to how often you'll play this game, how it slowly steals time from whatever applications or worksheets you're supposed to be working on.

It's surprising to find that there are only a dozen games included in *Solitaire for Windows*. They range from the fairly commonplace Calculation, Four Corners, Golf, Klondike, Poker Solitaire, Pyramid, and Scorpion to the devious Beleaguered Castle and Spider to the addictive Forty Thieves and La Nivernaise. It's the format of **Interplay**'s game that makes it appear more than it is: The rules are more user-friendly than in other computer games, making it easier to win. There are also four tournament modes — a holdover from *Solitaire Royale*, a standard in the field.

In two of the tournaments, the Championship and Grand Tours, you simply play through each of the games in tandem. The Championship Tour, however, puts devilish time limits on each game — you start with only ten seconds for Golf, for example, — and the only way to add precious seconds is to play cards into the foundation (or other pile as the individual rules apply). Your total score depends on the number of cards you play, as well as bonus points for winning or needing few redeals (again, as rules apply).

The Golf Tour is deceptively ordinary. You simply play nine rounds (no time limit), and your score depends on the number of cards you have left after each round. Since Golf is one of the easiest games to win, you might not give this one a second glance. But if ever there was a "just-one-more-time" tournament, this is it. The final tour is a Custom Tournament that allows you to play whatever games you wish, in whatever order you choose.



Solitaire for Windows also features such standards as auto-finish, deck select, board select, and undo move. There's duplicate play for two or more players to try their skill at identical games, and alternate rules help you cheat a little on some of the more difficult solitaires.

— *Leslie Mizell*

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PC03

EA*KIDS

Electronic Arts Launches New Educational Line

LANCE ELKO

When you say "Electronic Arts," a variety of images comes to mind: the largest U.S. entertainment software company, top sports titles, quality games, huge success in the video-game market, and so on. Any number of descriptions fit EA, but educational software publishing has never been one of them.

That's changing in 1993. With its recently announced EA*Kids lineup, Electronic Arts is going head to head with educational heavyweights such as Broderbund, The Learning Company, and Davidson.

There's no doubt that EA took note of Sierra's fruitful foray into this market last year (for the record, Sierra had some success with a number of educational titles in the early 1980s). And it's quite obvious from even a cursory glance at PC owner demographics that today's kids — the progeny of peaking boomers — are an increasingly important market.

During a recent trip to Electronic Arts' headquarters in San Mateo, California, we had a closeup look at the first titles in the EA*Kids line. Frankly, we were expecting some nicely executed products, but basically of the "me-too!" variety, solid B-grade stuff. Instead, we saw several highly innovative and original titles with clearly focused educational content, state-of-the-art graphics, and charming sound and music.

It didn't take long for us to sense the buoyant enthusiasm and obvious deep commitment of the people behind EA*Kids. After talking with them, it wasn't so surprising that the company's initial learning titles are so strong — the new lineup has been in development for nearly a year, a busy time during which Electronic Arts spent many months in careful preparation, recruiting folks from Broderbund and The Learning Company, as well as establishing an EA*Kids' Advisory Board, comprised of an impressive array of educators and education technologists. In short, EA did its homework.

DEBUT TITLES

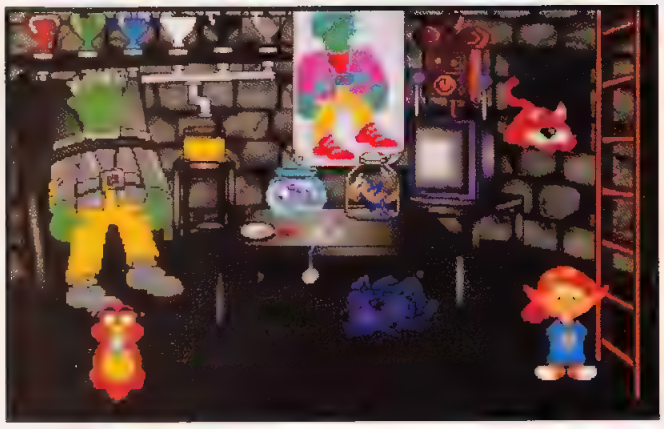
The first three EA*Kids products due for release are *Ping and*

Ping and Kooky's Cuckoo Zoo

Kooky's Cuckoo Zoo, *Scooter's Magic Castle*, and *Eagle Eye Mysteries*. Look for each of these titles to release in PC format early this spring. Macintosh versions will follow in the summer, and CD-ROM versions are expected to be available in late 1993.

Ping and Kooky's Cuckoo Zoo features two comical tour guides, Ping the Panda and Kooky Cuckoo, who lead kids on a train tour through a large zoo. The four zoo environments — jungle, farm, tundra, and savannah — are filled with animals who teach color-, number-, and letter-recognition, counting, and matching. Ping is a reliable host, but Kooky sometimes flies through a scene and mixes up various picture components, requiring the child to put things back together. A humorously animated and musically scored Zoo Revue lets kids choreograph their own show of dancing and singing animals. *Ping and Kooky* is designed for ages 3-6. The package includes an activity guide for parents and children.

Scooter's Magic Castle, targeted to ages 5-8, consists of 15 rooms filled with learning games and activities. By opening castle doors and looking behind stained-glass windows, children find games that hone skills in matching, counting, color and pattern recognition, typing, and so on. A variety of other activities lets kids create and experiment. Theo the Owl is present throughout the program to provide instant online help. *Scooter* features three difficulty levels and, like *Ping and Kooky*, includes an activity guide for both parents and children.



Scooter's Magic Castle

Eagle Eye Mysteries

The first installment in an EA*Kids detective series, *Jake and Jennifer Eagle in Eagle Eye Mysteries* is designed for the 8-to-12-year-old set. Somewhat reminiscent of the approach used in popular book series from *The Hardy Boys* to *Encyclopedia Brown*, *Eagle Eye* presents one of 60 mysteries and asks the child to solve it by gathering clues, making deductions, and interviewing suspects. As players improve their sleuthing abilities, the cases become harder.

The *Eagle Eye Mysteries* series introduces brother-and-sister team Jake and Jennifer Eagle, each with unique talents that the player must learn to understand and use.

THE SECOND WAVE

A second group of EA*Kids titles for the PC is due out in the summer. *Peter Pan* is the first in the *Story Painting Adventure* series, based on classic tales, and designed for ages 6-10. The series is conceptually unique, successfully blending the formats of graphic adventure and interactive cartoon. Using a set of animated paint tools, children control the storyline by implementing the right tool at the right time — for example, painting a bridge over a river at the appropriate moment helps the child escape a villain, or changing night to day might shed enough light for the child to read a map.

Also due out in the summer is *Video Jam*, another unique title that lets kids create animation shorts synchronized with one of dozens of available music tracks. After selecting characters, sequences, special effects, and music, the child can view the finished "video," modify it, then save it. A particularly nice feature is that the video can be saved on disk for a friend, who can run it even without a copy of *Video Jam*.

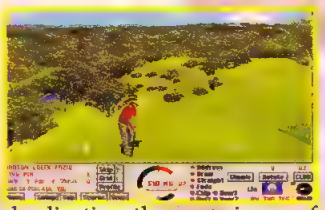
GP

3rd Annual GAME PLAYERS PC Entertainment Game Awards

GAME OF THE YEAR

Links 386 Pro Access Software

For sheer realism, no simulation matches the performance of *Links 386 Pro*. No other golf game does as good a job of



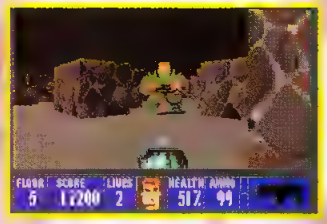
duplicating the experience of heading out to the course and playing a round. Access took a bit of risk in requiring *Pro* users to have an SVGA card, plenty of RAM, and, of course, a 386. But by listening to the suggestions and complaints of *Links* owners, Access has created a "must see to believe" golf sim.

Game design: Bruce Carver

BEST ARCADE ACTION GAME

Wolfenstein 3-D Id Software

One of the most talked-about games of 1992, Id Software's *Wolfenstein 3-D* hit the market as shareware distributed by Apogee. It's not for the faint of heart—there's lots of bloodletting and agonizing screams as you infiltrate a Nazi stronghold, shooting what seems like an entire regiment of soldiers and officers. *Wolfenstein* wowed

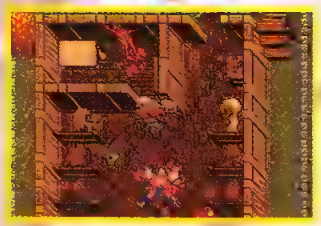


gamers with its smooth-scrolling graphics, lifelike sound effects, and challenging mazes. It's success has spawned a retail version, *Spear of Destiny*, from Formgen.

Game design: Id Software

BEST FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME

Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss Origin



Setting a new visual standard, *Ultima Underworld* does a great job convincing you that you're really moving through corridors as you fight, think, and negotiate your way from level to level. The mouse-based interface is superbly designed, making the mechanics of play nearly transparent, and the Auto-Mapping feature is the best in the business.

Game design: Paul Neurath

BEST GRAPHIC ADVENTURE

Indiana Jones & The Fate of Atlantis LucasArts

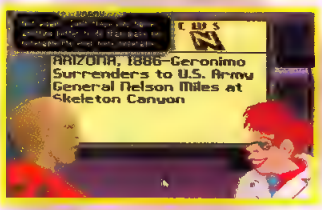
The storyline—*not* based on an Indy movie—is topnotch. The game's plot (Jones and psychic Sophia Hapgood try to prevent the Nazis from using the secrets of Atlantis to rule the world) is delivered with outstanding graphics and animation, and a truly wonderful soundtrack. Much of the credit for *Atlantis'* success is due to its replay value, thanks to three different play modes.

Game story and design: Hal Barwood and Noah Falstein

BEST LEARNING GAME

Time Riders in American History The Learning Company

It's part movie script and part American History lessons, but *Time Riders* is all fun. The goal is to unscramble historical headlines and find out Who did



What, and Where and When they did it. Covering the years 1492-1905, *Time Riders* includes more than 2,300 clues about 145 historical events and 114 famous Americans. For ages 10 and older, *Time Riders* looks and sounds as good as it plays.

Game design: The Learning Company

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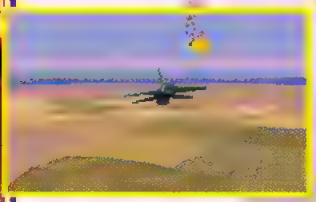
BEST SIMULATION

Falcon 3.0 Spectrum HoloByte

Beyond *Falcon 3.0*'s superior flight model and graphics lies an unprecedented level of mission depth, featuring



multiple theaters, detailed objectives, Red Flag training missions, head-to-head modem play, and control of an entire squadron of jets and pilots. For hardcore jet jockeys, *Falcon 3.0* is not a game or a sim — it's a way of life.

Game concept: Gilman Louie (Spectrum HoloByte)
Game design: Spectrum HoloByte

BEST SPORTS GAME

Front Page Sports: Football Dynamix

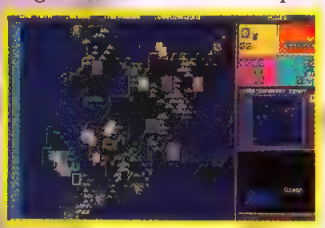
The on-field action is outstanding: runners spin and stiff-arm would-be tacklers, receivers dive for the ball, and defenders evade blocks to sack the quarterback. But as good as the graphics, animation, and sound are, *Front Page Sports: Football* really shines is in its vast array of realistic components — team management, the college draft, off-season trades, retirement, injuries, free agency, and so on. The game is just as deep statistically as it is in playbook and play designs.

Game design: Patrick Cook

BEST STRATEGY GAME

Global Conquest MicroProse

Highly respected veteran designer Dan Bunten may just have his best game ever with *Global Conquest*. By synthesizing concepts from a variety of games and adding some of his own fresh ideas, he has created an explore-and-conquer challenge that has wonderful depth



and solid replay value. *Global Conquest* is also laced liberally with humor, which manages to entertain without diluting the game's strategic integrity. In our book, this one is a good bet to become a classic.

Game design: Dan Bunten (Ozark SoftScape)

BEST PUZZLE GAME

The Island of Dr. Brain Sierra

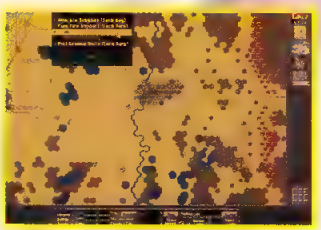
This is positioned and marketed as an educational game, but at its heart, *The Island of Dr. Brain* is a masterfully designed puzzle-filled adventure. It of-

fers lots of different games and a wide range of random topics, making it exceptionally replayable. It also has broad appeal to all ages. The novice and standard levels are perfect for older kids (ages 12-16), and the expert level is a tough contest for most players.

Game design: Pat Bridgemon

BEST WAR GAME

V for Victory: Utah Beach Three-Sixty



The first of several battlesets in the V for Victory system, *Utah Beach* features a variety of Battle of Normandy scenarios as well as a full-blown campaign game. The game system employs Three-Sixty's "realism of command" philosophy, in which the player directs various battalions and regiments, but can choose to leave tactical actions and strategic objectives to the computer-controlled historical model. Both the elegant, superbly designed interface and the game engine are without peer in the war-game category.

Game design: Atomic Games (Keith Zabalaoui, Ed Rains, Larry Merkel)

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Darklands MicroProse

Just Grandma & Me Broderbund

The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes Electronic Arts

EXCELLENCE AWARDS

- Aces of the Pacific — **Dynamix**
- Carrier Strike — **SSI**
- Carriers at War — **SSG**
- ChessMaster 3000 MPC — **The Software Toolworks**
- Conquered Kingdoms - **QQP**
- Crusaders of the Dark Savant — **Sir-Tech Software**
- David Leadbetter's Greens — **MicroProse**
- Dune 2 — **Virgin Games**
- Pacific War — **SSI**
- Gobliiins — **Sierra**
- Gods — **Konami**
- Grandmaster Chess — **Capstone**
- Hardball III — **Accolade**
- Jack Nicklaus Golf & Course Design: Signature Edition — **Accolade**
- Clouds of Xeen — **New World Computing**
- Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge — **LucasArts**
- Rex Nebular and the Cosmic Gender Bender — **MicroProse**
- Shadow President — **D.C. True**
- Task Force 1942 — **MicroProse**
- The Incredible Machine — **Sierra**
- Theatre of War — **Three-Sixty**
- Tom Landry Strategy Football — **Merit Software**
- Tristan Pinball — **AmTex**
- Volfied — **Readysoft**
- Zoo Keeper — **Davidson**

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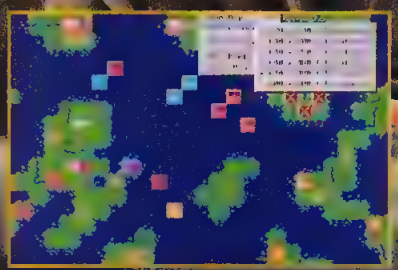
By Mark Baldwin and Bob Rakosky



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NEW WORLD COMPUTING

Product Information Number 241

ALTERNATE LIVES

LEGENDS OF VALOUR

NEIL RANDALL

Ever since the first installment of Wizardry, way back in the heyday of the Apple II, fantasy role-playing games have typically featured a first-person point of view. In the Wizardry, Bard's Tale, AD&D, and Might & Magic series (to name a few), the main part of the screen shows what the character or party is seeing. The concept behind such a display is that you explore as the characters in the party would explore, by seeing the world unfold before their eyes.

The problem with this approach has always been its static nature. Move forward one square, and the world in front of you moves incrementally closer. Nice idea — except movement and vision don't work this way. When you walk down the street of your home town, the rest of the population doesn't stand still until you make a move; they carry on doing whatever it is they were doing regardless of your movement. Nor do buildings go by one "square" at a time. We see objects scroll by smoothly, no matter how quickly we move or how often we turn our heads.

Last year, Origin introduced *Ultima Underworld*, a game that made good on the promise of first-person perspective. *Underworld* offered a smooth-scrolling view with solid graphical textures, two features that made you feel as if you were actually moving along the passages and gradually approaching objects in the distance. It was extremely effective, bound to generate similar products.

Legends of Valour, from **SSI**, is the first direct competitor to *Ultima Underworld*. Like *Underworld*, *Valour* offers a three-dimensional, smooth-scrolling first-person viewpoint, one that attempts to simulate the feeling of real movement. Don't get the wrong idea; *Valour* is not merely an imitation of *Underworld*. *Underworld*'s feeling of movement is more complete than *Valour*'s, but the interesting inhabitants of *Valour*'s game world make its setting much more realistic. If you like dungeon-crawling, go with *Underworld*; if your tastes lean more to the open air of cities, take *Valour*. Better still, try both.

Valour takes place entirely in a town called Mitteldorf. You play the role of an adventurer trying to locate your cousin Sven, who has gone to the town and sent back a letter convincing you to follow him. You start by creating a character — an extremely easy task with none of the numerical manipulations required by most FRPs — and then purchase a few supplies before heading into town.

As soon as you arrive, you begin interacting with the townsfolk — *lots* of them. What's more, each has a different name, a different religious leaning, and a different profession. The one immediately noticeable feature of this game, in fact, is that Mitteldorf is simply teeming with people. Call for their attention, and they'll talk to you (usually), insult and attack you (occasionally), or offer to sell you insurance and other entrepreneurial services (rarely). If you want to get anywhere and learn anything in this town, you'll have to talk to many of its citizens.

The game package includes a map of Mitteldorf, which you can use to keep track of your progress as you move from location to location. On the left is a list of the major

locations — the shops, temples, guilds, taverns, and so forth — each with a unique identifier (the Casino is B5, the Temple of Odin is T2, etc.). The idea is to mark each building on the map with the appropriate identifier, thereby learning your way around the town. Most of the quests to be performed in this game depend on knowing the whereabouts of specific buildings, so keeping the map updated is crucial. To help further, you can click on a map icon and get a smaller, on-screen version of the map, including your location. Automapping also occurs in

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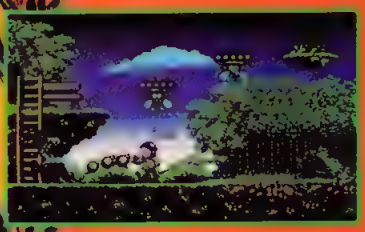
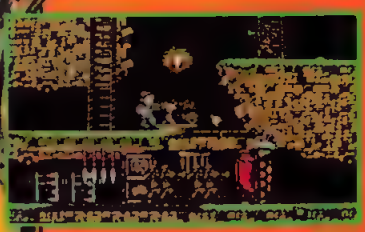
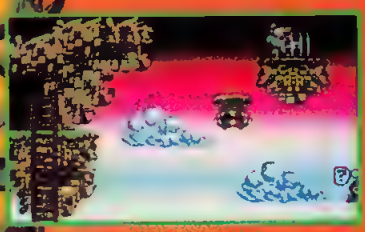
FOR THE AMIGA AND IBM PC







Screen shots shown are from the Amiga version of the game.

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Suite D-102
San Jose, CA 95131

Electronic Arts
(Distributor)
1450 Fashion Island Blvd.
San Mateo, CA
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(800) 245-4525

The Name of the Game

ocean

Product Information Number 250

underground areas, so there's no excuse for getting lost in the game.

Inside the taverns, hostels, shops, guilds, and temples, you'll find a service desk. By moving forward until you bump into these desks, you'll access the most important interactions of the game. At a temple or guild, for instance, you'll be able to join the institution, strive for higher ranks, and purchase special services. You can purchase food and drink at taverns and hostels, and at some places you can gamble away your hard-earned cash. In shops you'll be able to buy and sell items, and at several locations you can read notices. Notices come in two types, information and employment, with the former telling you all kinds of important things and the latter informing you of tasks you can perform to help you increase your bankroll.

And earning money is vital in this game. You start with a little, quickly discovering that you need much more. That's not new, but unlike most FRPs, you don't become financially stable in *Valour* by collecting huge treasures left by vanquished foes. Instead, you sell items you've found to shop owners, perform some menial employment, and search buildings for the occasional dropped coin — then watch it all disappear on such frivolities as food, drink, and initiation and advancement fees at guilds and temples. Then, just when you think you have a few bucks in hand, some hyperactive city guard will arrest you, and another 10 or 20 coins quickly disappear. Much of your time in *Valour*, especially in the early going, is spent simply keeping your fiscal head above water. A bit like real life, eh?

Valour is a game of adventure rather than plot-fulfillment. You don't start the game with an overriding quest; instead, you uncover things to do as you go along. By reading all the notices and locating all the temples and guilds, you'll find a wide number of tasks to complete, some of which will gain you status, others simply money. Eventually you'll find yourself part of a much more substantial series of quests, but only after many hours of play.

In the early going, the tasks are nearly all designed to help you learn the city. Notices will ask you to find an object in one location and deliver it to another, usually on the other side of town. To find the locations you must seek the help of the citizenry, keeping in mind that some know the city better than others. Eventually you'll have a solid grasp of where you are in the city at any point, and you needn't worry about asking everyone you meet for directions. But by this time, the tasks will become more difficult and more dangerous, and often much more vague.

Discovery is the focal point of *Valour*, and for the most part your exploration is unimpeded. You can beat up whomever you wish, but combat opportunities rarely present themselves until you've progressed fairly far in the game. Unlike many FRPs, you don't take two steps and run into another group of six zombies and a minotaur; in fact, you can spend most of your first 50 or so gaming hours not fighting at all. When you do, the combat system is simple and effective, and you can even choose to have the computer do it for you. Many FRPs use combat as a means of disguising the fact that the game's world is quite small. *Valour* isn't one of them, and it's all the more welcome as a result.

If there's a downside to this game, it's the fact that you seem to be doing little more than running errands, especially early on. Find a box in the Armoury, for example, and run it over to Olaf's Emporium. Then head for the Casino to locate a chest, and take it all the way across town to the Mermaid's Rest. Even the initiation quests demanded by the guilds and temples are simple search-and-return missions, and after several hours they become quite tedious. You'll be very glad when your tasks begin to take on greater importance.

But with a first-person viewpoint that actually works (though you can't move your head up and down, as you can in *Underworld*) with a night view of the city that in itself is worth the price of the game, and with a world that is extremely rich with life, *Legends of Valour* has a great deal to recommend it. It would be nice if the graphics of the people you meet were as strong as those of the buildings, and it would be even nicer if the view didn't deteriorate into huge pixels when you get too close to objects, but these are things that can be corrected in a sequel. For now, *Valour* gives us something substantially new, raising the FRP stakes higher in the process.

Legends of Valour is the first direct competitor to *Ultima Underworld* — and it's not just an imitation.

GP

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Product Information Number 251

THE DESKTOP GENERAL

CAMPAIGN — A "STEALTHY" CONTENDER

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

In our business, a good deal of time is spent waiting for prematurely announced products from major companies, some of which straggle in 6-12 months after their ballyhooed "release date." What's more, we often wind up spending the *next* six months discovering the bugs and waiting for our patch disks (a growing trend that must cease if this industry wants to expand its market).

It is therefore cause for signal rejoicing when a superior product comes, as it were, out of nowhere — a "stealth" game — one that not only delivers what it promises, but that does so without any glaring deficiencies in installation or game play. Last year's favorite stealth games, *The Perfect General* and *The Lost Admiral*, were both from QQP, and are certainly not obscure any longer; now comes *Campaign*, a hugely ambitious strategy-and-tactics simulation developed by U.K.-based **Empire Software** and distributed by **ReadySoft** of Ontario, Canada.

The sheer scope of *Campaign* is enough to elicit admiration. You can play either simple battles, garden-variety campaigns (The Ardennes, North Africa, the Pripet Marshes) or humongous campaigns such as D-Day and Kursk. Logistics, air and artillery support — everything is factored in nicely, using a highly original system which enables you to play at a strategic level, or to jump in at a tactical level and take command of an individual tank. Should you opt to take control of an individual vehicle, your strategic plan continues to unfold as specified — changing status from Field Marshal to tank gunner is merely a matter of perspective and mood, and does not negate your authority nor your plans.

In the 3-D battle view, you can either take part or simply ride along as an observer, letting the computer handle fire and movement. A couple of mouse-clicks puts you in another vehicle, at another spot in the battle, for a different view of the action. Over 150 Allied and German vehicles are modeled, very handsomely, and the 3-D effects are exciting. Given the scope of the game, some graphic compromises are necessary: terrain and buildings are generic, and explosions are of the old-fashioned "spewing triangle" variety. But on the whole these "you-are-there" scenes

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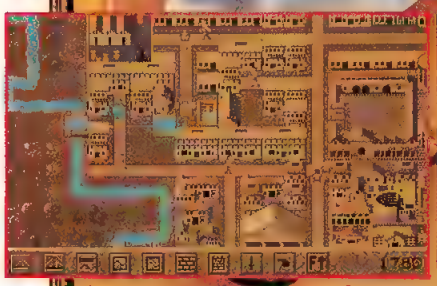

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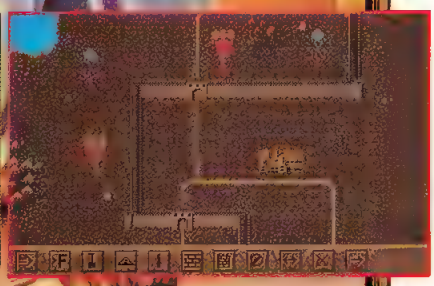
Battles may also be fought out in detailed, animated combat using a much enhanced version of Impressions' Cohort (Cohort II will be available separately).



Keep out hostile tribes with cross-country walls to match The Great Wall of China

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work rather well, suggesting the chaos and violence of a large-scale armored action.

Two problems were noted; whether or not they are major flaws depends on what expectations you bring to such a game. First, the tanks simply move too fast for the scale of the artwork — these babies scoot along at upwards of 50 mph. True, the Panthers move slower than the armored cars, but they *all* still move too fast for comfort. The other problem lies in manning the guns. Unless you set up with two joysticks — one to control steering and another to handle the turret gun — you can only train and fire the gun using keyboard control. Specifically, the "L" and "G" keys to train the weapon, the "F" and ";" keys to elevate and depress, and the space bar to fire.

quirk would not matter so much, except that the computer-controlled gunners tend to consistently shoot behind their moving targets (didn't anybody train them to lead?), causing you to waste a lot of rounds before scoring a hit.

It's cause for rejoicing when a superior product comes seemingly out of nowhere — one that not only delivers what it promises, but that does so without any glaring weaknesses in installation or game play.

A simple mouse-controlled ring-sight would be much-appreciated, especially since the only way you can correct the fall of shot is by eyeballing the trajectory and compensating (often while moving at 45-50 mph). You need to be an octopus to do this *and* manually steer the tank at the same time. This

The ideal interface for a simulation this ambitious would almost have to be telepathic, but I admire the way *Campaign*'s designers have made their choices and swallowed the inevitable compromises. The unwieldy has been made manageable and attractive.

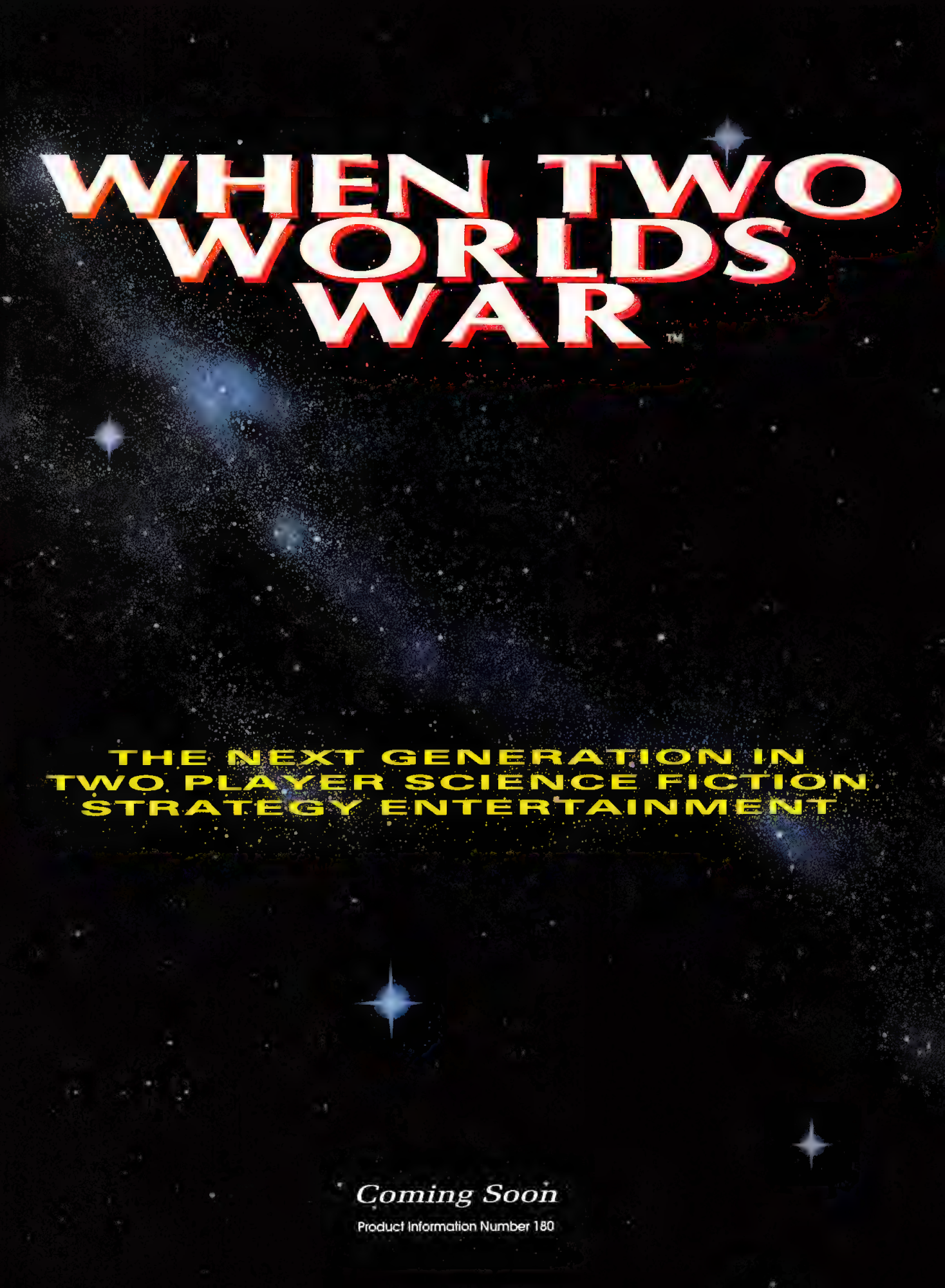
Where realism and ease of game play conflict, *Campaign* comes down at least once on the side of game play by having on-screen "production centers" that feed replacement convoys into the front lines. In reality, of course, no sane army would position its factories so close to the front, but their inclusion does open up a new type of objective, and bombing them gives the air force something to do between battlefield sorties.

Campaign tries — as hard as any war game I've ever seen — to be all things to all players. The question is not whether it succeeds; no one game can, given the limitations of both computer hardware and the human brain. The important issue here is how close it comes in how many different areas, and *Campaign* does a fine job in many regards. In my opinion, the best system for a "layered" war game (strategy as the icing, tactics as the cake-layers) is the one developed by Gary Grigsby for *Second Front*, wherein you get a blow-by-blow report of the tactical action without any attempt to portray it visually.

Campaign tries to have that cake and eat it, too, and while the battlefield scenes still smack too much of an arcade shooter, the other aspects of the game are extremely well-conceived and engrossing to play. I came away from my hours spent with it with a feeling of great respect. Games such as this, in their impact on the genre, have a fertilizing effect; they suggest new points of view, new interfaces, and new design parameters. Our hats are off to Empire for *Campaign*.

GP

Battlegroup M18 GMC Hellcat
Front Armour (mm) 12
Side Armour (mm) 7
Rear Armour (mm) 7
Maximum Armour Penetration (mm) 172
Maximum Road Speed (km/h) 75
Maximum X-Country Speed (km/h) 32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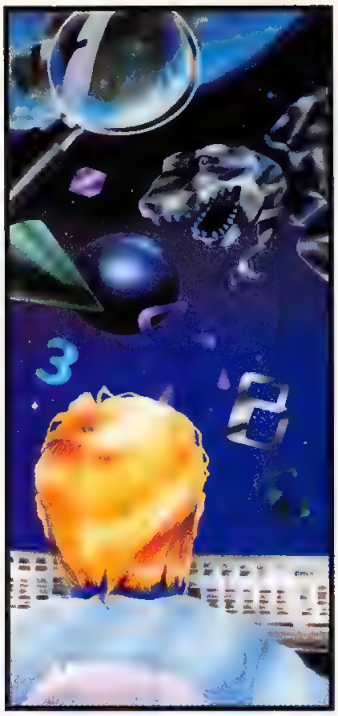


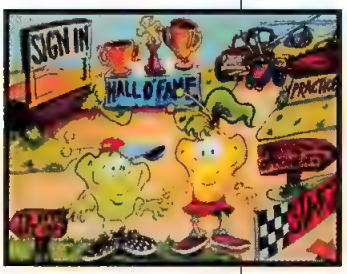
THE LEARNING GAME

FOUR FOR SCIENCE

LESLIE EISER

Quarky & Quaysoo's Turbo Science

Four new science-oriented releases have recently appeared on the educational software shelf — *Quarky & Quaysoo's Turbo Science*, *Dinosaur Adventure*, *Space Adventure*, and *Body Illustrated*. Each is unique, exemplary in its area of focus, packed with solid science, and nicely presented with attractive graphics and appealing sound. Best of all, these titles are clearly educational. With the American educational system scrambling for funds, and with students in need of great teachers, challenging material, and a foundation of basic skills, this is good news. There's no question that science software, whether it's used in the home or in the classroom, can be a great teaching supplement.

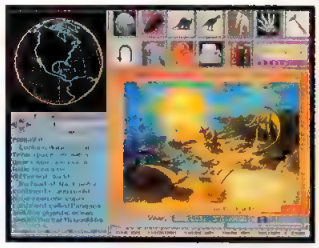


Quarky & Quaysoo's Turbo Science

Users from 9 to 14 will find *Quarky & Quaysoo's Turbo Science*, from **Sierra**, a blast and a half. Basically a drill-and-practice program with a decidedly upbeat motif (you must correctly answer science questions in order to earn money and compete in a race around Goopville), *Turbo Science* takes off where most similar programs stop. Sure, some of the questions are standard multiple-choice fare, requiring little more than a good memory to answer. But other questions are not so simple — and this is where *Turbo Science* distinguishes itself.

To provide students with some hands-on data manipulation, *Turbo Science* includes an on-screen tool kit with a variety of measuring devices including a light meter, a tape measure, a scale, and a voltage meter. Single-step experiments (who's the tallest mountain climber?), and multi-step experiments (which of three objects has the greatest density, assuming they all occupy the same volume?) have users clicking the tool-kit icon, selecting the appropriate instrument, and taking measurements. Only rarely are the measurements alone sufficient to answer the question. More often, the numbers derived from the measurements are only a part of the information required — the rest must be figured out from a knowledge of the specific physical science fact involved.

What's even more exciting from an educational perspective is the unique way that *Turbo Science* gets kids to increase their knowledge of science facts. When faced with a tough question during a race, the safest thing to do is to click the "I'm looking-it-up" icon. Time immediately stops and a hint window containing a specific page reference pops up.



Dinosaur Adventure

Checking out that page in the companion Research Guide always answers the question. And despite the often silly appearance of the cartoons in the 150-page guide, information is presented factually, using proper science vocabulary. What's offered is solidly grounded science, filtered through the kind of comedy that appeals to youngsters working independently.

If *Turbo Science*'s 20 different locations, thousands of multiple-choice questions, and cool animation sequences make for a science-with-entertainment approach, *Space Adventure* and *Dinosaur Adventure*, published by **Knowledge Adventure**, are examples of science education through open exploration. These huge databases of glo-

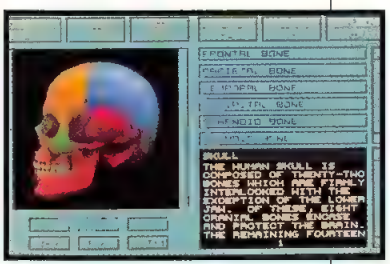
Dinosaur Adventure

rious hi-res graphics, lengthy textual explanations, full-motion video, interactive games and simulations, lovely audio sound effects, and musical interludes are fantasy playgrounds for the inquisitive. Regardless of topic, these interactive environments encourage the curiosity seeker to take time to wander and thoroughly explore a single topic at a time.

Dinosaur Adventure is a combination of free-form research and preschool drill. In the research section, you can move through the data base by clicking on major topics from Herbivore to Fossils, use weight and length sliders to compare one dinosaur to another, or look at the world of dinosaurs from a geographical perspective.

Other main-menu options include a read-aloud Dinosaur Story book, the relatively silly Name-A-Saurus and Read-A-Saurus Games, and six dinosaur movie shorts.

More dramatic when taken as a whole is *Space Adventure*. In addition to the vast collection of images accessible through major topics such as


SKULL
THE HUMAN SKULL IS COMPOSED OF TWENTY-TWO BONES WHICH ARE TIGHTLY INTERLOCKED WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE LOWER JAW. OF THESE EIGHT CRANIAL BONES ENCASE AND PROTECT THE BRAIN. THE REMAINING FOURTEEN

Body Illustrated

Rockets, Human Exploration, Robotic Exploration, Science, Solar-System, Universe, and Science-Fiction, there are four action simulations and seven movies to see. Minor topics include the history of the space program and a huge section devoted to the search for extra-terrestrial life (SETI) projects. Listening to John F. Kennedy's speech and watching the Apollo 7 blast off is a stirring historical moment made even more vivid by its presentation on the computer. A rather limited game option will send you back through the data base looking for particular images and specific facts, but the value in *Space Adventure* is in free exploration rather than any structured investigation.

Both Knowledge Adventure titles are initially overwhelming in breadth and depth. Fortunately, an alphabetical index makes finding specific images easy. It's easy to spend hours clicking and pointing, pointing and clicking around the data base — but it's time well spent in the interests of curiosity and the name of education.

Quite different in approach, in feel, and particularly in content is *Body Illustrated*, a computerized human ana-tomy textbook from **Spirit of Discovery**. Why rely on a dull text when you can study human anatomy at the foot of a teacher who believes in only the best VGA graphics, zoom options, and painless quizzes? If *I* had to learn the name and function of every major part of the human body, this would be the way I'd want to do it. There are 13 pre-set lessons covering all of the body's major systems, from skeletal to nervous, endocrine to reproductive. Whether you choose one or choose them all, *Body Illustrated* keeps records of what you've done, and what you should do next.

Most importantly, *Body Illustrated* is a visual and auditory treat. Digitized speech routines carefully pronounce the names of each part of the body, while three-dimensional models are color-coded to represent the location of the part under study. Models can be rotated horizontally or vertically, making it easy to examine each part more carefully.

With the U.S. educational system scrambling for funds, and with students in need of great teachers, challenging material, and a foundation of basic skills, this foursome is good news indeed.

Complete textual descriptions of a part and a brief summary of its function accompanies each image as well.

A word-search option on the help menu makes it easy to find a specific term, and other menu switches cycle the graphics and text through a series of related images, and display either a menu of body systems or a whole-body view of the selected system. Move within a system by clicking on the image, or on the name of the desired part. Other options include a competitive quiz mode and an encyclopedia of body parts.

Body Illustrated

Turbo Science is drill-and-practice with an entertainment bent, the two Knowledge Adventure titles are open-ended research tools packed with visual images, and *Body Illustrated* is a computerized anatomy textbook. All four programs demonstrate the considerable expertise of their developers, the educational mettle of their designers, and the visual capabilities of 386 machines equipped with VGA graphics. Best of all, they're all good science teachers, and welcome additions to the Learning Game.

GP

HIGH COMMAND

JEFF SEIKEN

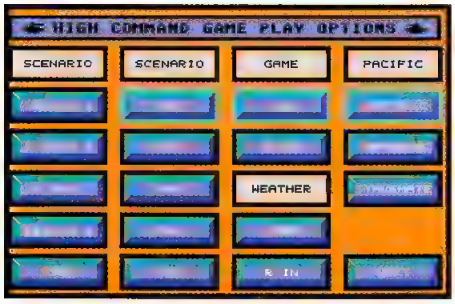
Category: War Game

Publisher: Colorado Computer Creations

Developer: Colorado Computer Creations

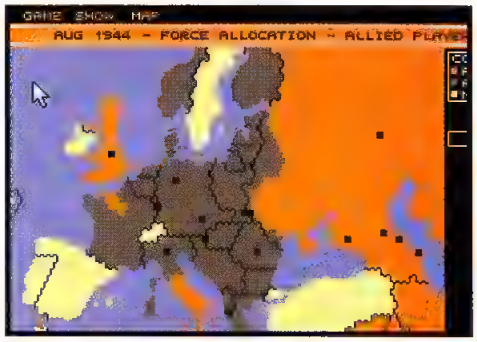
Rating:

World War II in Europe was a massive, messy, altogether remarkable affair, and so is *High Command*, a strategic-level simulation of the conflict from Colorado Computer Creations. The game's scope is unprecedented, for it doesn't restrict itself to re-creating only the military aspects of the war. Rather, *High Command* takes the land, air, and naval campaigns, and fits them into a fully realized economic and political framework. And it does so in a thoroughly seamless manner. Most surprising of all, however, is that *High Command* was not created by established designers moonlighting from one of the major software houses, but



is the handiwork of a couple of war-gaming enthusiasts who created the game in their spare time.

In many respects, *High Command* is reminiscent of *Action Stations!*, another home-grown program that astonished war-gamers a few years ago. Like *Action Stations!*, *High Command* boasts a sophisticated, super-detailed design, the intricacies of which are documented in a manual that runs longer than many novels. For precisely the same reasons, neither game is suited for mass consumption. But diehard war-gamers have ample reason to be delighted, for here is a game unquestionably developed by — and intended for — their own kind.



Version 1.0 of *High Command* actually made its debut last summer, and while the game's immense promise was obvious, so were its problems. In particular, its convoluted mechanics channeled most of the player's energies into battling the interface rather than the enemy. To the credit of Colorado Computer Creations, though, they recently issued an upgrade (mailed free of charge to Version 1.0 purchasers) in which they overhauled the interface, fixed a number of bugs, and generally ironed out a lot of the kinks in the program. It still isn't a perfect game (a statement which probably applies to every game ever released), but at least it's a vastly more playable one.

High Command looks very much like a board game transferred almost directly to a computer screen. It plays like one, too, as each monthly turn follows a rigid sequence, with separate phases for land, air, and naval movement. But the resemblance only extends so far, for *High Command* also does things that no board game could duplicate. For instance, within each phase, Allied and Axis actions are resolved simultaneously. Fog-of-war is also accounted for with quite elaborate rules governing the detection of enemy units. Even a concept as basic as unit strength is handled in a sophisticated fashion. Every unit has a combat factor, but this only reflects its raw strength; the unit's actual effectiveness in battle also depends on its organization level and combat rating.

High Command has surface detail aplenty. However, the real brilliance of the game lies not in its parts, but in the way the whole design fits together. Military, economic, and political concerns are inextricably linked, with decisions in one department either directly or indirectly influencing events in the other two. Nowhere is this more evident than in the business of resource allocation. Not surprisingly, a large share of your industrial output must go toward the construction of new units to reinforce your armies in the field. At the same time, some of your production needs to be plowed back into the economy to support long-term economic growth. Finally, consideration must be given to how many economic points should be diverted toward political ends, such as financing diplomatic overtures or intelligence operations.

As it should be in a game of this scope, the challenge is to devise a coherent strategy that balances short-term needs against long-term goals. But this is easier said than done, par-

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ticularly in the realm of economics and diplomacy, where your initiatives may not bear fruit until one or more years have passed. If *High Command* teaches anything, it's that strategic planning requires patience, discipline, and forethought. Historically, Hitler was deficient on all three counts, and his frequent policy flip-flops and procrastination were major factors in Germany's defeat.

There's no denying that *High Command* is a tremendously complex game; in fact, one could argue that its complexity is integral to its appeal. But the complexity never reaches intolerable levels, in part because the program allows you to hand over any function you like to the computer. If the mechanics of resource transportation strike you as so much minutiae, you have the option of ignoring the matter entirely.

It also helps that the designers have done an outstanding job of making the game as accessible as possible, beginning with a 15-page tutorial

chapter in the manual that walks you through a special introductory scenario. While most games would have stopped here, *High Command* goes a step further by supplying four additional learning scenarios that successively layer on more rules and detail. Once finished with these, you should feel prepped and ready to tackle a full-fledged campaign scenario. *High Command* gives you a choice of five, each of which picks up the war from a different starting date and continues until one side has capitulated.

As noted earlier, *High Command*'s most striking achievement is that it gives the political and economic dimensions of warfare their full due. The game is less successful, however, in its treatment of things that fall strictly within the military domain. Version 1.1 corrected one of the design's more egregious problems by toning down the impact of air strikes on ground targets. Yet, naval bombardments still have the ability to devastate land units to a ridiculous extent. If offshore attacks by naval units had been this effective in the real war, the Allies never would have bothered to invade at Normandy. Instead, they would have sailed up and down the coast and simply shelled the Germans into submission.

Of considerably more consequence, though, is a problem that might best be described as one of scale. In general, land units in the game represent a sort of a cross between a single corps and an army. While this bit of abstraction is perfectly acceptable, *High Command* runs into trouble because the size of the units doesn't mesh with that of the map. This fact becomes painfully obvious as soon as you survey the situation in the east: neither the Germans nor the Russians have anywhere near enough troops to form a continuous front line. Instead, you get clumps of units clustered around a few key cities, and a lot of open space in-between. The effect is almost quaint. Rather than the mass juggernauts of the 20th century, each country's forces look more like the small, self-contained armies of the 18th century.

From a grand strategic perspective, *High Command* still plays well and gives quite valid results. But on a tactical or operational level, the relatively small number of land units in play — coupled with the simultaneous nature of movement and combat — can lead to some swirling, wide-open maneuvers that only dimly reflect the actual campaigns.

High Command can also be criticized for the quality of its artificial intelligence (AI), although this is a fault it shares with just about every other computer war-game on the market. The program actually has five settings for the AI ranging from Easy to Expert, but the computer seems all too prone to blunders at every level of play.

The graphics leave something to be desired, too. The designers apparently decided to go for the lowest common denominator: The game supports EGA only. While the displays exhibit a lot of color, the images lack the crisp, sharp quality of VGA. It also would have been nice if countries, cities, and rivers could have been identified on the map. As it stands now, the map consists of nothing but a dreary assortment of nameless dots and symbols.

What does this all mean? Just that *High Command* is not an elegant or particularly pretty game, and that its rough-around-the-edges design could stand more work. But what it lacks in spit and polish it more than compensates for in sheer verve. No other game around delivers quite as comprehensive a picture of total war in its 20th-century context as does this one. Flawed, yes; cumbersome, true; but for all of its failings, *High Command* is never less than fascinating. Better yet, according to Colorado Computer Creations, further upgrades are planned, possibly culminating in a full-scale revision featuring SVGA graphics and modem play. If the designers carry through with their pledge to support the game, then war-game aficionados truly have something to look forward to.

GP

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD II: LABYRINTH OF WORLDS

BERNIE YEE

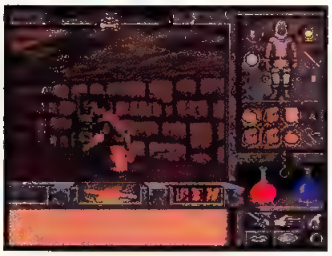
Category: Fantasy Role-Playing

Publisher: Origin

Developer: Looking Glass

Rating:

Origin's marketing department has earned a reputation for beginning ad campaigns for new products far in advance of the actual release dates. Remember the ill-fated "The Assault Begins Christmas 1991" slogan for *Strike Commander*, which is only now ready for release? And the ad campaign for *Privateer* began



this past December, even though it's not scheduled for release until well into 1993.

But at the same time *Privateer* ads began springing up in magazines, Origin quietly announced the release of *Ultima Underworld 2: Labyrinth of Worlds*, the sequel to the award-winning *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*. In contrast to the extended hoopla preceding *Privateer*, ads for *Underworld 2* predated the release by only a few months, despite the fact that *The Stygian Abyss* was Origin's most successful product last year.

The first *Underworld*, in fact, was more than a commercial success; it was truly groundbreaking. It undeniably changed the face of role-playing, raising players' graphic expectations so much that most other FRPs — despite their pretty artwork — now look choppy and primitive by comparison. And *Underworld 2*, programmed by *Underworld* creators Looking Glass (formerly Blue Sky), is in many ways a step up from the original.

How I help thee, stranger?
Er, yes.
And may I ask what business thou hast coming here?
I just wandered in by accident. Canst thou train me in the ways of magic?
I have some questions to ask.

The biggest enhancement is in plot, the weakest point in the original *Underworld*. The sequel takes place one year after you, the Avatar, defeated the Guardian. It is the Festival of Reconstruction, and all your friends have gathered at Lord British's castle to celebrate the anniversary of your triumph. In the midst of the festivities, the castle is enshrouded by a mysterious black gem-like shield — courtesy of a vengeful Guardian. The shield negates traditional magic (Lord British can no longer heal you), and is slowly snuffing the life out of the castle's inhabitants; the Guardian will spare them only if they swear loyalty to him.

Meanwhile, the Guardian threatens to wage war on Britannia while you and the other powerful champions are trapped in the Guardian's prison. As Avatar, your primary job is to find a way out of the blackrock prison and defeat the Guardian yet again. But first you must play exterminator, going into the basement, sewer, and tunnels below the castle to rid the area of rats, bats, headlesses, and gazers (what they're doing in the castle in the first place isn't made clear). Somewhere in the basement you'll discover a black gem which can mystically transport you to alternate realities also under siege by the Guardian.

In the first alternate reality you encounter a goblin stronghold, allied with the Guardian on that plane and warring against humans. You must discover what's happening there, then free the human leader while eluding the goblin guards scattered around the prison tower. The human captives will tell you about the Guardian's warmongering on their home soil, and provide you with clues as to the nature of the black shield which imprisons your friends.

The keys to defeating the Guardian are scattered among the various realities; each reality is tied into a different facet of the Guardian's gem, making *Underworld 2* larger than its predecessor. Conveniently enough, the only form of magic that works in the castle is the rune-based magic of *The Stygian Abyss*, so you'll need to go rune-hunting again. Iolo, Dupre, Nystul, and other characters from the Ultima universe will be in the castle to aid you by giving you information and advice, but they won't journey with you since they have other things to do.

The wall sets have been improved; the resolution has stayed the same, but *Underworld 2* uses digitized images of walls and a greater variety of stones to achieve an even more realistic appearance. Critics will note that the animation isn't as smooth as *Wolfenstein 3-D*, and that the graphics aren't quite as crisp as SSI's new pseudo-3-D entry, *Legends of Valour* (reviewed in the "Alternate Lives" column elsewhere in this issue), but the not-so-obvious fact is that no other game out there allows you to truly move and

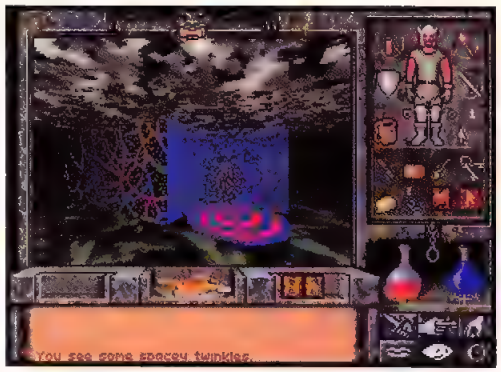
play in three dimensions. You can jump, swim, or look up, down, and all around in both *Underworlds*, things not even attempted in *Wolfenstein 3-D* or *Legends of Valour*.

In other words, *Underworld 2*, like its predecessor, is the real 3-D thing, allowing you to walk, run, leap, and look around to your heart's content. And there's no question that the graphic representations of the characters you meet have been greatly improved. The resolution for monsters and NPCs has been upped nearly two-and-a-half times, making the people and nasties you meet look less like cartoons and more like animate, physical objects — they even cast shadows. You'll still see images break into huge pixels when you get really close, but it's a vast atmospheric improvement over the

original. Conversations, menu-driven as in the original game, are now more context-sensitive, and consequently more realistic.

The atmosphere doesn't end there, either. The sound effects are now digitized, and if you have a stereo sound board, you can hear the creaking of a door pass from your left speaker to your right speaker. Water splashes, chains rattle, gates creak, and ominous sounds echo through the dungeon, lending an air of palpable dread to the proceedings. The underlying musical score is decent: At least it doesn't get on your nerves, which I've always maintained is almost the best you can hope for in a score for a computer game. Of course, key speeches are done with digitized voices.

All the Ultima games strive to portray real-world physics, and *Underworld 2* is no different. There are more subtle environmental elements to contend with, like slippery and treacherous ice caverns, water currents, and waterfalls. Your arms and armor begin to show wear from continued use, so it's wise to stay on the lookout for better fur and fangs.



Although you can't import your character from *The Stygian Abyss*, the interface remains relatively unchanged from the first game, so veterans should have little or no difficulty mastering the controls. Every action can be performed with a point and click, and, like the original, drag-and-drop inventory management makes item-juggling Mac-easy. The command icons (use, look, talk, fight, etc.) are simple, and all containers can be accessed by "using" them. And *Underworld 2* has the best automapping system around, allowing you to take notes on the map itself. Pure role-playing satisfaction.

Skill progression has been scaled down from the first *Underworld*, requiring you to make some strategic decisions about which skills you wish to advance in other than combat and magic; repair, lore, and lockpick are three which can be very helpful later in the game. Combat occurs in real-time: Just hold down the mouse button until the power gem glows, then let fly. Score a hit, and a red splatter appears on your foe — the larger the splatter, the more damage you've done. Few events are more satisfying than taking a big swing at a foe and watching a double-sized blood splat appear on its surprised face.

Clicking on the rune bag allows you access to the various runes, which can be positioned to cast the appropriate enchantment. All this takes place in real-time, of course, so combat continues (in other words, the bad guy keeps pounding you) while you're rummaging around for that last rune to complete your Resist Blows spell. But don't buy *Underworld 2* expecting an AD&D bloodfest; interaction and exploration are hallmark traits of Origin's RPGs, and that tradition is carried on in this game.

Although *Ultima Underworld 2* doesn't provide any new breakthroughs such as above-ground exploration, it remains on the cutting edge of gaming software, if only because there's no other product capable of doing what *Underworld 2* does. Looking Glass has listened to the complaints and comments from *Stygian Abyss* veterans, using their input to craft substantive improvements to the game engine. They've increased the amount the Avatar can carry and don't correlate it as closely to strength level, for example, and they've provided shortcuts from the main castle to the gem room, eliminating the tedious trekking through each level that made the original *Underworld* a bit tedious at times.

I'm told that Looking Glass is considering above-ground exploration and a science fiction milieu for the next installment, which may be a CD-ROM title. This can only bode well for gamers looking for the most realistic fantasy role-playing environment that their 32-bit processors can handle. Until then, *Ultima Underworld 2: Labyrinth of Worlds* is a stunning (and still seminal) dungeon crawl, one that defines the experience.

GP

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WHAT'S AHEAD

A REPORT FROM THE 1993 WINTER CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW

There's always excitement at the Consumer Electronics Show. The four-day extravaganza is a showcase for every facet of state-of-the-art electronics technology — audio, video, computers, video games, telecommunications, and you name it. As usual, much of what we saw was a level or two better than what we saw at the previous year's show. Starting next issue, we'll be covering in detail some of the games announced at this winter's CES. But for a look at what's ahead and who's doing what, read on — 1993 is already shaping up to be a potential turning-point year in some regards, particularly in the areas of new game technologies and CD-ROM software.

Access: This may not be a prolific company, but it consistently earns high marks for quality with nearly every release. They were showing *Links 386 Pro* (our choice for the 1992 Game of the Year — see our awards story elsewhere in this issue) as well as their most recent graphic adventure, *Amazon: Guardians of Eden*.

Accolade: In a joint venture with Jack Nicklaus Productions and *Golf Illustrated Magazine*, Accolade announced a contest for owners of their *Jack Nicklaus: Signature Edition* golf sim. The challenge is to design a perfect par 3, par 4, or par 5 golf hole using the architect feature of *Signature Edition*. Contest details and official entry forms will appear in the March, April, and May issues of *Golf Illustrated*. Three grand prize winners — one for each of the three holes — will win a trip to play in a Pro-Am event this fall. Also, 33 runner-up prizes will be awarded.

In a move to expand their sports lineup, Accolade announced exclusive signings with hockey star Brett Hull and soccer great Pele. Although no actual titles were named, Accolade expects to release games with these endorsements in late '93 for the PC, as well as the Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo systems.

Accolade also announced that PC-game publisher Tsunami (see below) has joined them as a distribution partner.

Activision: If you've been following the computer-game industry since the early- to mid-1980s, chances are you fondly remember Infocom's Zork games. These text adventures were wildly imaginative, capturing the imaginations of tens of thousands of gamers. Activision, under its Infocom division label, announced a new graphic version of Zork for release this spring.

Dubbed *Return to Zork*, this game is being developed by Eddie Dombrowsi, who developed both *Earl Weaver* games for Electronic Arts. Dombrowski will strive to remain true to the spirit of the Zorkian world and its unique sense of sarcastic humor, while adding state-of-the-art graphics with digitized video as well as an original soundtrack and digitized speech. A CD-ROM version of *Return to Zork* is also planned.

Azeroth: The cartoon "Inspector Gadget" has been doing fairly well in syndication, and now Azeroth has created a graphic adventure for kids based on the wacky cartoon series. *Inspector Gadget* puts the child on the trail of Dr. Claw, who's kidnapped U.N. delegates to use as bargaining chips in his evil plans. With colorful graphics, zany contraptions, and environmentally correct themes, *Inspector Gadget* serves as a child's introduction to graphic adventures.

Binary Zoo: Educational software newcomer Binary Zoo announced three debut initial titles that will be distributed by Broderbund. Each of the titles will feature an onscreen computer companion named Edison, and will be aimed at children 7-14 years of age. In *Smithsonian Mystery at the Museums*, you join Edison for a treasure hunt through museums solving puzzles and replacing missing treasures. *Rock and Bach Studio* lets kids create their own music videos, whether they're beginning or experienced musicians. And in *Wild Science Arcade*, kids learn about friction, gravity, electricity, mass, and other areas of basic physics by guiding a ball through 30 levels of mazes.

All three products feature digitized speech for Sound Blaster and compatibles, and SVGA or VGA graphics.

Bright Star: This Sierra subsidiary, based in Bellevue, Washington, will be following up *Alphabet Blocks* (a fall '92 release designed to teach preschoolers how to speak and read the alphabet) with a program, not yet titled, that teaches beginning word sounds, such as *th*, *sh*, and *ch*. Also due out shortly is a spelling program (it too is untitled as yet) for ages 7-10.

Broderbund: Can Broderbund continue to sustain the Carmen Sandiego line? Our take is a resounding "yes" — our sneak peek at *Where in Space Is Carmen Sandiego?* tells us that there's a lot of game here, and a tremendous amount of educational value thanks to an extensive database of information about the solar system and other astronomical phenomena. Lots of digitized iamges from NASA are used, and the product is most impressive in its breadth.

Another title that holds a great deal of promise is *Prince of Persia 2: The Shadow & The Flame*, a 15-level, puzzle-filled adventure that picks up where the award-winning original left off. The storyline takes the prince out of the dungeon and into the city, then on to a deserted island.

Broderbund's CD-ROM-based Living Book Series, which debuted last year with *Just Grandma and Me*, is continuing in '93 with *Arthur's Teacher Trouble* and *Aesop's Fables, Book One: The Tortoise and the Hare*.

Capstone: It's "Schwing!" time at Capstone as the company introduces *Wayne's World*, a humorous graphic adventure based on the hit movie, along with several other new titles. *Terminator 2: Cyborg Chess* combines the excellent chess engine from Capstone's *Grandmaster Chess* with

animated 3-D cyborgs. The success of earlier *Trump Castle* games has led Capstone to *Trump Castle 3*, a highly realistic gambling simulation featuring SVGA graphics, modem and network play, and tons of playing options.

Other titles shown at CES include *Home Alone 2*, a graphic adventure in which you play Kevin in New York hiding from the Wet Bandit Brothers; *LA Law*, based on the popular television program; *Trolls*, a fanciful graphic adventure; and *Bridge Master* (for a review, see the Game Bytes section), a Super VGA bridge game featuring digitized sound, and network and modem play.

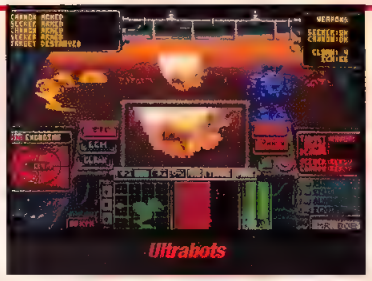
DoMark: One of the biggest surprises of CES was *AV-8B Harrier Assault*, which should hit store shelves before MicroProse's *Jump Jet*, announced at the 1992 Summer CES. In this multi-role strategic and tactical simulation, you do more than fly the world-famous Harrier; you also coordinate an entire military campaign, from landing troops to commanding ground forces to designating targets for air strikes. Available in either a VGA or SVGA version (the SVGA version will require an S3 Windows Accelerator Card), *AV-8B* looks to be a surprisingly deep strategy game and realistic flight simulator.

Virtual Reality Studio 2.0 is a productivity software package which allows you to create virtual worlds. Features include a 3-D shape designer, animation program, sound effects manipulator, 2-D bitmapped sprites and animation cells, and a VCR playback function. Also on display was the FRP *Shadowlands*, reviewed in this issue.

Dynamix: *Betrayal at Krondor*, Dynamix's first fantasy role-playing title, should be released shortly, and it's a beautiful game that promises a lot of play value. Thematically based on Raymond Feist's Riftwar Legacy series of sci-fi fantasy novels, *Krondor* offers a huge world to explore, presented in nine distinct "chapters" with subplots woven throughout. *Krondor* features more than 2,500 frames of rotoscoped animation.

Next up in Dynamix's highly successful Great War Planes series will be *Aces Over Europe*, a sim that lets you fly for either the U.S., RAF, or the Luftwaffe in historically authentic scenarios from WWII. It features 16 aircraft, including the P-51 Mustang, Focke-Wulfe 190, and the Me-262 jet fighter. Dynamix tells us that *Aces Over Europe* is more technologically advanced than last year's acclaimed *Aces Over the Pacific*.

Electronic Arts: Of several new EA titles, the one that made the biggest splash was *Kasparov's Gambit*. Not only is the program endorsed by World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov, but it also incorporates digitized video to provide extensive on-line tutoring and advice from Kasparov. Kasparov, on hand at CES for the product launch, personally helped develop the program's tutorial component. *Gambit* includes a a variety of play levels, running game analysis, customizable 2-D and 3-D boards, a 500-volume library of the most famous historical chess games, plus tournament play and a rating system. Though *Gambit* is undoubtedly very strong, the real emphasis is on teaching the nuances of this classic game to newcomers.



Also new from EA are *SEAL Team*, a Special Forces combat sim based on the U.S. Navy SEAL's operations against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army from 1966-69, and *Ultrabots*, a title originally announced several years ago by Data East. This futuristic sci-fi strategy-and-tactics game has been redesigned to make the most of current PC technology standards, and has a very distinct look.

The latest effort from the Bullfrog development team (of *Populous* fame) is *Syndicate*, a dark adventure set in 2096 when the world is divided into three business empires: Europe, Asia, and America. Although we saw a very early version of the game, we were excited with its potential.

Expect a CD-ROM version of *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes* sometime later this year. The CD game adds digitized voice and video to the successful disk-based original, which debuted in the fall of '92.

GameTek: The long-awaited *DaemonsGate, Volume One: Dorovan's Key* is very near release. In a first for PC game publishers, GameTek produced a 9-minute introductory film, shot in Australia, for *Daemonsgate*, and will package it on VHS tape with the game. A massive project, *Daemonsgate* features a game world with over 5,000 individual inhabitants and a vocabulary of over 70,000 words.

In the meantime, GameTek has announced *Ashes of Empire*, another sprawling adventure and strategy game obviously inspired by the radical changes that have swept the Soviet Union. *Ashes*, the product of *Midwinter* creator Mike Singleton, sets the player in a nation experiencing the tumult of the collapse of a totalitarian government and the rise of democracy. Also on tap are *Tesserae*, a pattern-matching puzzle game for Windows, and *Talking Super Jeopardy*, the latest incarnation in the company's top-selling series of TV games.

Humongous Entertainment: If you haven't seen *Putt Putt Joins the Parade*, the debut title from this new company, you're missing something. It's the first in Humongous' Junior Adventures line, targeted to ages 3-7, and it's a visual and auditory delight. *Putt Putt* was released this past December, and Humongous was on-hand at CES to show the follow-up, *Fatty Bear's Birthday Surprise*, as well

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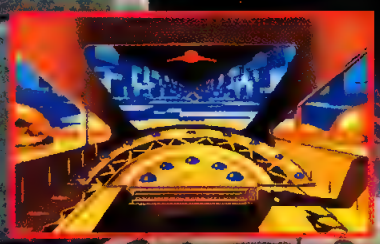

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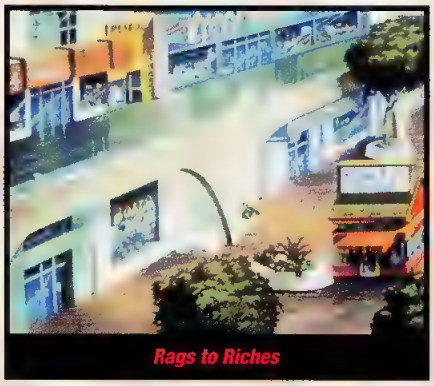
as *Putt Putt's Fun Pack*, a lower-priced program that bundles six traditional kids' games such as Hang-Man and Tic-Tac-Toe.

I-Motion: This recently formed U.S. publisher was showing *Alone in the Dark*, a 3-D graphic adventure inspired by the works of H.P. Lovecraft. Each game screen offers up to nine camera angles, and the polygon graphics used for characters and monsters makes for very smooth animation. See our review elsewhere in this issue.

Impressions: On display was the recently released *Caesar*, an epic Roman Empire simulation with a design reminiscent of *Sim City*. Impressions announced three new titles: *When Two Worlds War*, a futuristic strategy game based on an interplanetary conflict; *Rules of Engagement 2*, a real-time space-combat game that follows up the acclaimed *Rules of Engagement* (the sequel is being developed by Omnitrend, designers of the original); and *Edward Grabowski's The Blue & The Gray*, a multilevel simulation of the U.S. Civil War that will include Impressions' trademarked Micro Miniatures system. Grabowski was on hand to comment on the level of detail and historical research going into the game.

Interplay: A sneak peak at Interplay's planned 3-D dungeon adventure, *StoneKeep*, drew a good crowd at CES. The game features stunning digitized characters and a unique playing perspective. Look for much more on this title in an upcoming issue. Also at the show was *Rags to Riches*, a challenging and attractive business simulation with a very large dose of humor.

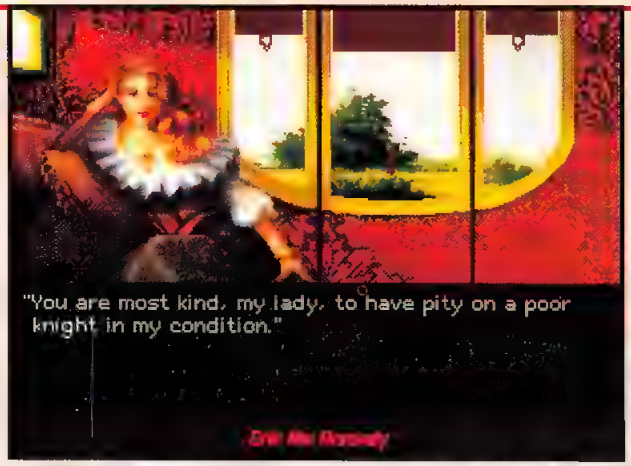

Rags to Riches

Three earlier MS-DOS titles are being significantly enhanced and released in CD-ROM versions by Interplay during 1993: *The Lord of the Rings Enhanced CD-ROM*, a popular Tolkien-based FRP; *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary Enhanced CD-ROM*, an adventure that includes the voices of William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy; and *SimCity Enhanced CD-ROM*, originally published by Maxis Software. This spring, Interplay will ship *The Classic 5*, a game package featuring the traditional games of chess, checkers, backgammon, go, and bridge.

Konami: 1992 was the year this video-game giant decided to take the PC entertainment software market seriously, and while some of their initial games were below par, their newest batch of games all appear to be high-quality products.

SVGA Air Warrior, an enhanced version of Kesmai's front-end air-combat sim for use on the GEnie network, is the first flight simulation available with Super VGA graphics. *SVGA Air Warrior* features 11 planes from WWII and the Korean conflict, and offers solo missions, head-to-head combat via a modem, and network play on GEnie against up to 50 other pilots. *SVGA Air Warrior* was released several weeks prior to the show, and you'll find a complete review elsewhere in this issue.

Also released before CES was *Batman Returns*. In this graphic adventure inspired by last summer's movie and developed by Park Place Productions, the player guides Batman through Gotham City in an attempt to thwart The Penguin. The game appears to have plenty of play value — Konami says even veteran gamers can expect around 40 hours of play.



Champions, originally announced at the 1991 Summer CES, is finally nearing completion. Though tagged with the "Vaporware" label by some, the version we saw at the show looks to be the stuff that dreams are made of for role-playing fans, with an incredible character generation system and highly variable storylines.

Rebel Assault

Wilson Pro Staff Golf is scheduled for release just as this issue goes to press. The game, which carries a suggested retail price of $39.95, features VGA graphics and a nearly instantaneous screen redraw, even on a 286.

Legend Entertainment: Legend's latest, *Eric the Unready*, was on exhibit. This comic graphic adventure, released in January, is a raucous and sometimes bawdy romp through a zany Medieval world. Combine the humor of Infocom's Zork with Monty Python, and you'll have notion about this game's style.

LucasArts: Besides showing the *Star-Wars*' inspired *X-Wing* (see last issue), LucasArts unveiled *Day of the Tentacle: Maniac Mansion 2*, a wacky interactive cartoon in which the player controls three nutty kids in three different time periods. A CD-ROM and disk version will debut simultaneously. *Rebel Assault*, a graphically stunning arcade-action CD-ROM title with 15 levels of play, was also shown. If this game plays as good as it looks, it will warrant a lot of attention.

Finally, LucasArts announced a CD-ROM version of the 1992 hit *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis*, which will feature approximately 40 characters and 8000 lines of digitized speech.

Maxis: New titles from Maxis include *Sim Farm* — dubbed *Sim City*'s Country Cousin — in which the player starts with a small plot of land; and *Rome Alone*, a sim that begins with the player as a slave in a

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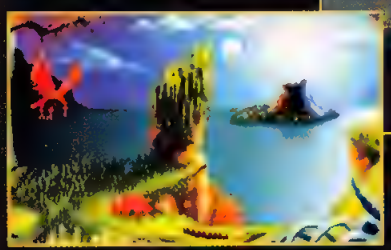

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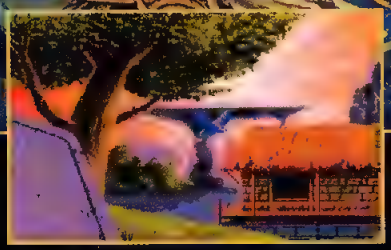

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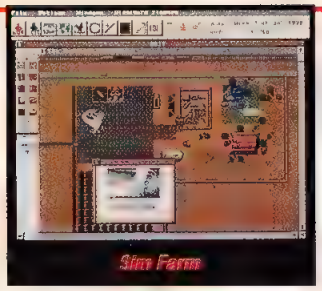


town located next to a ready-to-erupt volcano. You do anything you can to survive, and hopefully rise through the ranks to become Emperor of Rome.

MECC: Behind closed doors, the folks at MECC were showing a couple of very early versions of new educational titles. *Amazon Trail* (working title), conceptually similar to their award-winning *Oregon Trail* educational adventure, incorporates digitized graphics from scenes at many points along the famous South American river. MECC plans to include a gamelike element in which the player is engulfed by a mystical fog and transported in time, with the goal of teaching the history of the Amazon River basin.

T-Rex, Inc., much farther along in development, is a cute business simulation that lets kids run their own dinosaur park. To make it succeed, the child adjusts ticket prices, performs maintenance, improves property, hires new employees, etc., in an effort to grow the park and outperform the competition. *T-Rex, Inc.* seems to maintain a nice balance of fun and business.

Merit: *Kronolog, the Nazi Paradox* is the working title of a joint venture between Merit and CastleWorks, both based in Dallas. Set in 2020 A.D., the game's premise is that the Nazis were victorious in WWII. In order prevent the Nazi industrial machine from plunging the world into ecological disaster, the player must travel back in time to 1942 and reverse the events which led to the German triumph. Look for *Kronolog* at the end of the second quarter of '93.

Merit was also showing *Maelstrom*, its recently released futuristic strategy-war game. The game is set in a real-time universe, and involves espionage, resource management, and a cast of characters who, like real people, have mood swings.

MicroLeague: 1992 was the year that MicroLeague changed its name (from MicroLeague Sports to MicroLeague Interactive Software) to reflect its broadened line of game titles. At CES, MicroLeague showed its first U.S. titles from its new U.K. partner, Krisalis, and announced a pact with Games Workshop to develop software based on their board games. The first title from the Games Workshop alliance will be based on Bloodbowl, a board game which has sold almost 100,000 copies worldwide.

Also announced by MicroLeague was the signing of Edward Packard, an author of more than 30 "Choose Your Own Adventure" books in which the reader makes choices affecting the plot and eventually the outcome. The first MicroLeague-Packard game is tentatively titled *Dateline 2021*. Also, from MicroLeague's more traditional line, look for *QuarterPole*, a horse-racing sim, later in the year.

MicroProse: Many of the products MicroProse announced last summer were either being readied for production or already in stores by the time CES rolled around, so you can expect reviews on many of these titles in upcoming issues.

F-15 Strike Eagle III is the latest incarnation in MicroProse's award-winning series. Using a combination of 3-D polygon and bitmapped graphics to provide more realistic detail, *Strike Eagle III* offers a two-player mode in which you can fly head-to-head, side-by-side, or in the same aircraft, with one player assuming the role of pilot and the other taking on the role of weapons officer.

MicroProse's other new flight-sim, *Jump Jet*, puts you in the cockpit of the AV-8B Harrier for ground-attack and air-support missions. The game wasn't up and running at CES, but should be available now. *Task Force 1942*, a naval simulation focusing on the Solomons Campaign in 1942, has been receiving raves for its combination of wonderful graphics and strategic depth. Scheduled for a June release is *Pirates Gold*, an updated version of the MicroProse classic.

MicroProse has apparently been busy importing products from Europe, many of which look intriguing. *Legacy*, due out this March, is a horror/role-playing adventure with a first-person perspective, 3-D animated graphics, and automapping. As its name implies, *Dogfight* is an air-combat sim with craft from WWI to the present day; look for it in April. And war gamers interested in Napoleon-era tactics and strategy will want to check out *Fields of Glory*, which should arrive in July.

Milennium: This company's latest offering is *Daughter of Serpents*, a large role-playing adventure with fantasy elements. Set in Alexandria, Egypt, in the 1920s, *Daughter of Serpents* offers several storylines and a number of routes through the game, depending on which character you choose to portray. The game is available now.

Mindcraft: Besides showing their recently released *Star Legions* and *Magic Candle III*, Mindcraft exhibited *The Dogs of War*, an expansion disk for *Siege*, the fantasy castle warfare sim. *Dogs* offers 6 new castles, 24 new battle scenarios, and a modem-play feature.

Mindcraft's previously announced space-combat/strategy game *Mercenaries* has been rechristened *Tegel's Mercenaries*.

Origin: Although Origin was showing several top-notch new titles (*Ultima Underworld II*, *Screen F/X*, and *Serpent Isle*), most of the attention at their booth was focused on the public's first view of the long-awaited *Strike Commander*. It's clear that *Strike Commander* is the cutting-edge game in terms of PC graphics and animation technology. It's also a lot of game (for details, see last issue's cover story).

Pop Rocket: This newcomer announced its first title, *Total Distortion*, a CD-ROM product that's out of the traditional software entertainment categories. *Total Distortion* lets the player travel to another plane of existence to gather fresh material for the creation of music videos and new TV programs. By exploring unusual locations and interacting with radical adolescents, underground punks, metal heads, and mutants, the player must try to make a music video that will be purchased by TV producers back on earth.

Psygnosis: *Lemmings* fans will be happy to learn that *Lemmings 2: The Tribes* is much more than a clone of the award-winning original. There are now 12 distinct tribes of Lemmings, each possessing unique behaviors specially suited for the obstacles they'll face. The interactive demo we played was delightful, and the inclusion of 12 tribes gives the *Lemmings* concept a healthy dose of variety. *Lemmings 2* should be available by the time you read this.

Creepers is a puzzle-adventure in the style of *Lemmings* in which you use an assortment of tools to guide caterpillars — "creepers" — to safety. Its game mechanics are somewhat reminiscent of *Bill's Tomato Game*, a clever Amiga title that Psygnosis announced at last summer's CES.

Set in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust, *Armour-Geddon* puts six land and air vehicles at your disposal as you battle surface-dwelling mutants attempting to destroy your subterranean civilization. This futuristic simulation features two-player competitive or cooperative modes, and a wide array of weaponry and defensive technologies.

QQP: Known for its outstanding strategy and war games, QQP was displaying two recent releases, *Conquered Kingdoms* and *Battles of Destiny* (the latter is reviewed elsewhere in this issue). Bruce Williams and friends told us they are redesigning their award-winning war simulations *The Perfect General* and *The Lost Admiral* in order to improve graphics and enhance game play. Also underway is a WWII naval-and-air sim. We'll have more details in upcoming issues.

ReadySoft: ReadySoft's distribution parties Empire Simulations, creators of *Pacific Islands* and *Campaign*, are busily working on a huge, single-player RPG called *Cyberspace*. Set in the year 2090 in

a city dominated by massive corporations, *Cyberspace* has several exciting features: a first-person perspective with a head-up display that can be tailored to display any information you require, over 1 million NPCs, more than 100,000 unique buildings, and a powerful character generation system. The pre-alpha version we saw had outstanding animation, and interaction with NPCs appears to be quite involved. *Cyberspace* is slated for a May release date.

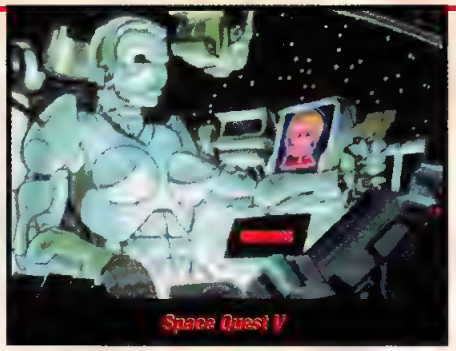
Revell/Monogram: One of the pleasant surprises of CES was an initial look at the first computer entertainment title from Revell-Monogram, the world's largest manufacturer of plastic model kits. Combining its expertise in model kits with a strong effort to move into CD-ROM multimedia, Revell will introduce three titles in its new Power Modeler series this year: *European Racers* (in April), *Muscle Cars* (June), and *High-Tech Aircraft* (August). Each product will include a complete plastic model kit for one of four featured cars or planes, animated 3-D assembly instructions, an action driving or flight simulation, and related information and entertainment components. For example, *European Racers* will include the model kit for the Bugatti EB110, but will also contain assembly instructions, information, and racing sims for the Bugatti as well as the Porsche 911 Slant Nose, BMW Nazca M12, and Lamborghini LP500S. The early version on display was very impressive. Each title will have a suggested retail price of $60.

Sanctuary Woods: This new CD-ROM developer from Vancouver announced a distribution agreement with Electronic Arts. First titles are expected to be *The Awesome Adventure of Victor, Vector & Yondo* and Shelly Duvall's *It's a Bird's Life*.

Sierra: A nice variety of new Sierra titles are due for release shortly. *Space Quest V* continues the wild and comical adventures of nutty Roger Wilco, and this latest installment, *The Next Mutation*, looks superb (and the original soundtrack is nicely composed and quite infectious). Believe it or not, the affable janitor/galactic hero becomes a starship captain this time out, and his job is to find some vile creatures who have been dumping biohazardous waste around the galaxy.

A new game coming from Leisure Suit Larry

creator Al Lowe is *Freddy Pharkus, Frontier Pharmacist*. Set in the Wild West, *Pharkus* is a zany adventure written in the tradition of *Blazing Saddles*. Also coming from Sierra is 256-color VGA version of the three-year-old *Hoyle Book of Games, Vol. 1*, with two new games added to the original collection.



New titles in the Sierra Discovery Series are *Lost Secret of the Rainforest*, an adventure that teaches scientific information about native people, plants, and animals; and *Twisty History*, an educational adventure that focuses on the life and times of Ben Franklin and Colonial Philadelphia.

Expect several new programs from Coktel Vision, a French publisher whose titles are distributed exclusively in the U.S. by Sierra. *Inca*, an action-adventure that was a recent best-seller in Europe, sets the player on a quest to fulfill a 500-year-old prophecy that will restore the lost Incan empire. *The Prophecy* is a combination adventure, FRP, and puzzle game, and *Gobliiins 2* is a puzzle-filled adventure that picks up where its charming predecessor left off.

Coktel Vision's *Adi Jr. Volumes I and II* are preschool educational titles consisting of math and reading programs mixed in with games. Difficulty levels are graduated as the child progresses. The *Adi* line is currently the leading educational software in Europe.

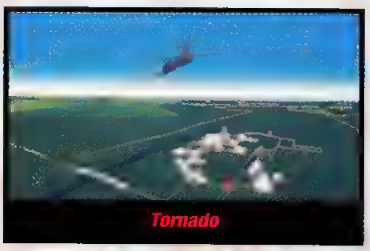
After a bumpy start, *The Sierra Network* has undergone a major overhaul and expansion, resulting in version 2.0, *ImagiNation*. With *ImagiNation* came the launch of LarryLand, an adults-only area

featuring casino games, and MedievaLand, where you can play *The Shadow of Yserbius*, a dungeon-based FRP created by the producer of *The Bard's Tale* series. SierraLand has been expanded in version 2.0, and now includes two- to four-player *Red Baron*, as well as Paintball, Boogers, Rocket Quiz, and several other games. Thanks in large part to its flat-rate pricing, *TSN* is one of the fastest growing online services in the world.

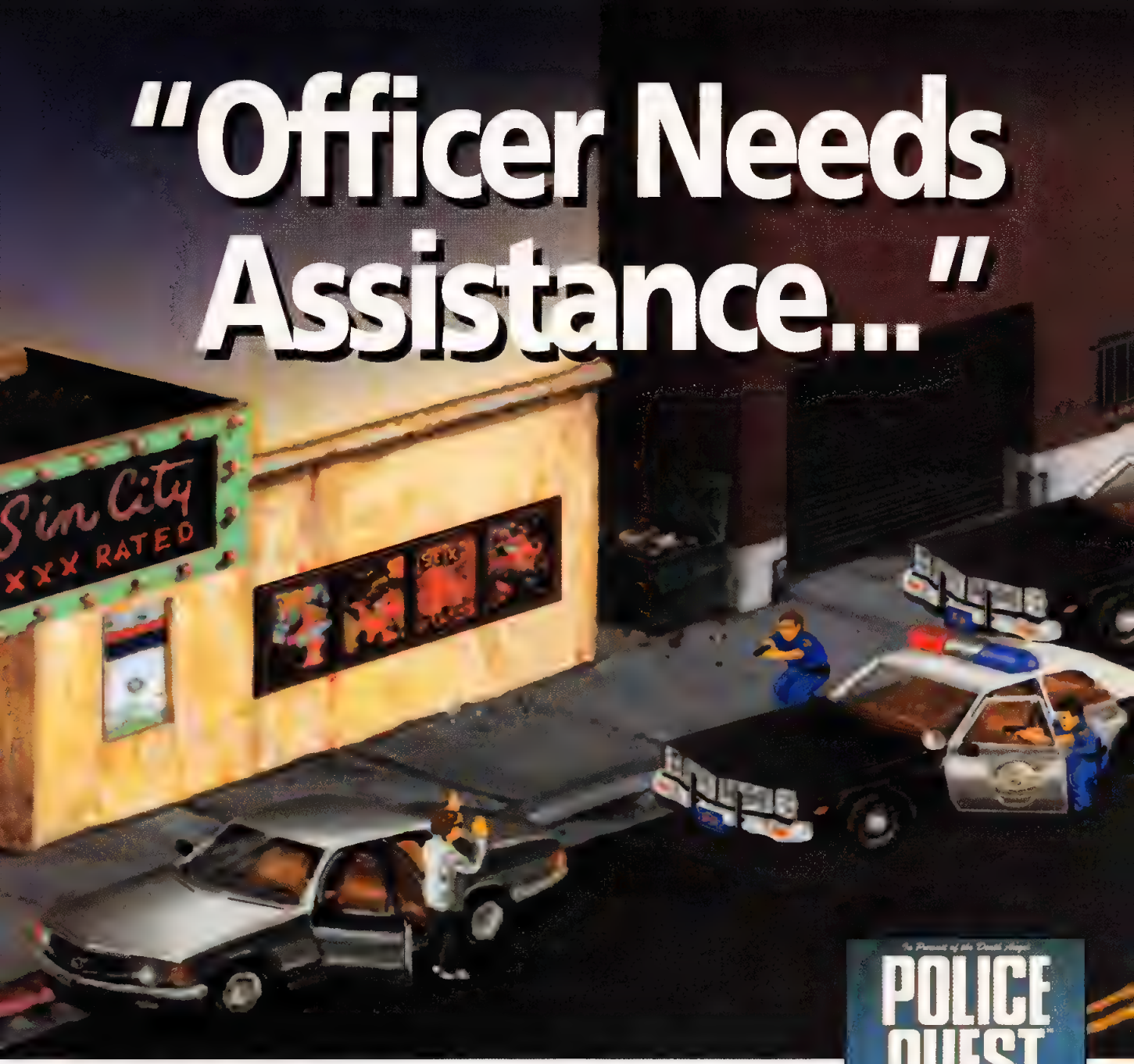
Sir-Tech: The creators of last year's award-winning *Wizardry VII: Crusaders of the Dark Savant* were displaying two new titles for 1993. *Realms of Arkania* is an FRP based on *Das Schwarze Auge*, the most popular pencil-and-paper game in Germany. Developed by German-based Attic Entertainment, *Realms of Arkania* is set in the Thorwal region of the Arkanian continent. Hordes of rampaging orcs are terrorizing the Thorwalians, and the only hope for repelling the marauders is for your band of adventurers to locate the Sword of Grimring. The character generation program has been developed as a stand-alone module, allowing for an incredible number of character attributes — in fact, characters possess both positive and negative attributes, the latter including greed, superstition, and phobias. *Arkania* is due out this March.

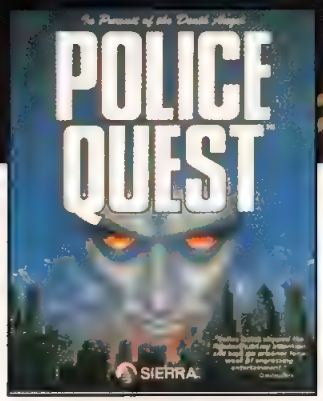
Ambush is the working title of a role-playing/resource-management game in which you lead a mercenary team on a mission to regain control of the island of Metavira. The island, used as a nuclear test site in the 1950s, is the only known habitat of the Scrotillia tree, the sap of which is used to treat a degenerative children's disease. The decisions you must make are difficult and varied, from selecting squad members to deciding how much sap should be harvested in the sectors you've reclaimed. *Ambush* is scheduled for a summer release.

Spectrum HoloByte: The latest aerial combat simulation from the top guns at Spectrum Holobyte will be *Tornado*, a jet fighter flight sim to be released



"Officer Needs Assistance..."





Take to the Streets in a Game so Realistic, it's Used as a Training Tool by Police Forces Across the Country

Law and Order magazine, the national journal of law enforcement officers, called *Police Quest* "a serious training tool... The simulation is based on skill and knowledge... The depth of the training is enormous."

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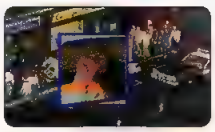
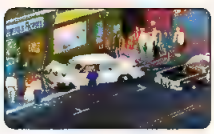
You're the only hope of a city stalked by a maniacal killer and plagued by drug-trafficking and robbery. Unravel this puzzling adventure while you learn and follow exacting police procedures used by real life cops.





The gritty realism is heightened by all-new 256-color art, extensive video-capturing, and the real-life experiences of today's cops.

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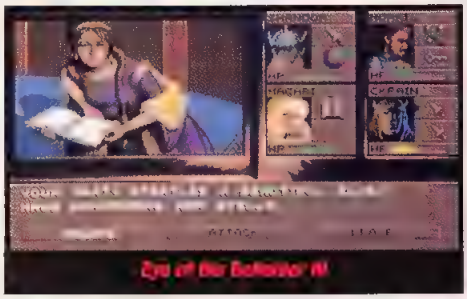
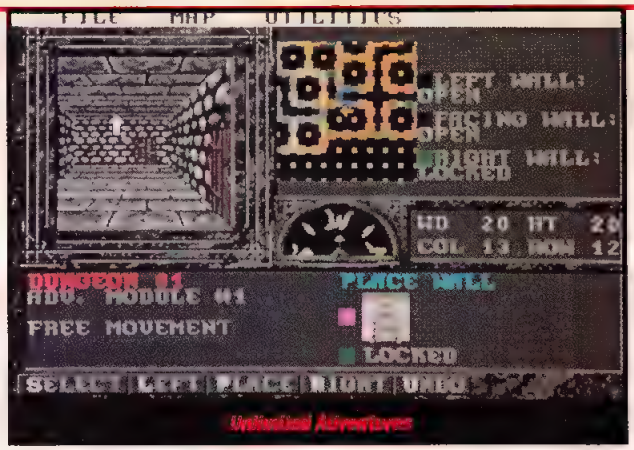
early this year. Developed with British-based developers Digital Integation, *Tornado* features ground attack, air interception, and reconnaissance, all of which take place simultaneously as you fly your sorties.

Spectrum is entering the CD-ROM market with *Iron Helix*, a science-fiction adventure game set on board a renegade spacecraft. The new game, set for both Mac and PC CD-ROM, is a joint project with CD developer Drew Pictures, Inc., of San Francisco, and will feature a first-person perspective and 3-D SVGA graphics. Spectrum is also set to release *National Lampoon's ChessMeister 5 Billion and 1*, a spoof of computer chess games. This tongue-in-cheek title also happens to feature a strong chess engine for serious players.

Spirit of Discovery: On display was *Beat the House*, which was released a month or so before Christmas. *Beat the House* is a casino simulation for up to four players that includes blackjack, roulette, craps, slot machines, and video poker. The game also features a pop-up tutor and 160-page study guide by gambling expert Avery Cardoza to help teach rules, terminology, and strategies. Look for a full review in our May/June issue.

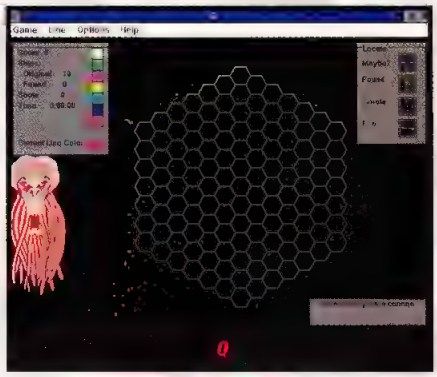


SSI: These guys have been *busy*, so you can expect lots of new products from SSI in the months ahead. First, *Tony LaRussa Baseball II*, co-designed by LaRussa himself, looks like it could be the new leader in baseball sims. It's extremely impressive in all aspects — statistically, visually, and in game play. *LaRussa II* recently became available, and add-on disks for players, stadiums, and fantasy draft are to follow shortly.



Dark Sun, originally shown at last June's CES, had a new and different look — apparently, SSI has decided to debut their new FRP gaming engine (the first since 1988) with this product. The *Dark Sun* world features 256-color VGA graphics that scroll smoothly in eight directions. Also on display was *Flashback*, Delphine Software's cinematic tour-de-force that uses rotoscoped graphics and 24 frame-per-second animation. SSI tells us that *Flashback* is six times bigger than *Out of This World*.

Eye of the Beholder III looks like a fine extension of the popular series, and Event Horizon's *Veil of Darkness* (built on the engine they developed for *The Summoning*) is a role-playing game combining horror and fantasy elements. That's not all — *Unlimited Adventures* is a "build-your-own" FRP with a massive database taken from SSI's Gold Box AD&D games. The player constructs his own game, selecting monsters, NPCs, and story art from the data base, and then uses a specially designed feature to create maps, places of encounter, traps, treasure, and so on. Finally, SSI announced three new expansion disks for its *Great Naval Battles* sim: *Super Ships of the Atlantic*, *America in the Atlantic*, and *Scenario Builder*.



Star Graphics: This newcomer debuted two Windows-based products: *A Collection of Classic Games* and *Q*. Included in the first title are Morris, a variation of Nine Men's Morris; Patterns, an object-oriented puzzle game; the solitaire game Beleaguered Castle, and two screen savers. *Q* is a simple but absorbing combination of puzzle and arcade game. Both packages are available directly from Star Graphics.

The Software Toolworks: This Bay Area publisher and distributor announced that it was the first company to ship two million units of CD-ROM software. Their latest CD-ROM titles (all at MPC specs) are *Newsweek Interactive*, a collection of multimedia stories

Mario Is Missing!

prepared by the *Newsweek* staff; *The San Diego Zoo Presents...The Animals!,* a stunning product that features more than 1,300 photographs and 2,500 pages of information accompanied by sound, music, and nearly three hours of narration; *The Chessmaster 3000 Multimedia Pro,* an enhanced version featuring digitized speech from former World Chess Champion Anatoly Karpov; and *U.S. Atlas.*

Contraption Zack

New disk products include *Mario Is Missing!,* a geography game that debuts a new Mario Bros.-licensed educational series; *Contraption Zack,* a puzzle-action game in the tradition of *D/Generation;* and *Battletoads!,* a conversion of a popular Nintendo platform game.

The Learning Company: Look for an upgraded version of *Math Rabbit* this spring. Targeted to ages 4-7, *Math Rabbit* employs a circus theme, lively animation sequences, and digitized speech to teach counting, number recognition, addition, and more.

Three-Sixty: Three new game titles were announced, including the company's first space adventure, *Battlecruiser: 3000 AD,* set for an April release. With over 50 strategic missions, *Battlecruiser* combines elements of space combat, flight simulation, strategy, and resource management with SVGA graphics.

The third title in the company's award-winning *V For Victory* series, *Market Garden 1944,* was announced for March release. Set in Holland, the game pits elite German troops against allies trying to capture and hold four crucial Rhine River bridges. As with the other two titles in the series, you can play as Axis or Allies against the

Market Garden 1944

Ringworld

computer or another player. Three-Sixty also announced a summer release for a Super VGA version of the highly regarded *High Command,* a WWII strategy game originally released through direct mail by Colorado Computer Creations.

Tsunami: Founded in 1991 by several former employees of Sierra, Tsunami is coming out of the gates in 1993 with four titles to be distributed by Accolade. Based on Larry Niven's best-selling Ringworld books, *Ringworld: Revenge of the Patriarch* is a sci-fi graphic adventure with hand-painted and digitized backgrounds, a storyline which varies according to player choices, and full sound card support. *Protostar: War on the Frontier* is a blend of graphic adventure, RPG, and space-combat simulator in which you serve as a soldier on the galactic frontier. *Blue Force: The Next of Kin,* from *Police Quest* creator Jim Walls, puts you in the role of a cop (naturally); the video-captured animation and fully digitized characters

Protostar

Blue Force

give the game a realistic look and feel. And then there's *Wacky Funsters!,* a collection of five nutty arcade titles which parody many popular genres of computer gaming.

Both *Ringworld* and *Wacky Funsters!* are currently available. *Blue Force* is due out this spring, while *Protostar* should be out this summer.

Virgin: Yes, it suffered a few delays, but work is finally finished on *The 7th Guest.* We've been playing the beta version for a few days, and it looks as though the media attention was well-deserved. Also impressive was the CD-ROM version of *Dune,* which has been considerably enhanced with digitized speech and full-motion video. And speaking of *Dune,* Virgin also had *Dune II* on hand (see the review elsewhere in this issue).

— The Editors

3DO'S GREAT LEAP FORWARD

The hottest ticket in Vegas was the exhibit by 3DO, a company premiering an astonishing new technology that has the potential to dramatically rewrite the spec sheets for multimedia electronic entertainment, education, and information. Spearheaded by Trip Hawkins, the founder of Electronic Arts, 3DO is poised to do nothing less than establish a worldwide consumer electronics standard for computer, video-game, and related systems that Hawkins says will be as pervasive as the VHS cassette.

The 3DO Interactive Multiplayer system is a computer hardware and software combination that makes a quantum leap beyond today's 16-bit computer and video game systems.

Technically, the system is set to deliver interactive multimedia as lifelike and realistic as television, audio CD, and videocassette technology. At its heart is a proprietary graphics and animation architecture that processes images at 50 times the speed of current personal computers and video-game systems. It also permits millions of colors to be displayed and moved each second. For example, in one second a typical 16-bit videogame system can animate about a million *pixels* (picture elements) that make up an animated screen. The new 3DO system can animate up to *64 million* pixels per second.

In addition, 3DO offers CD-audio quality sound (through digital signal processing); full-screen, full-color video at 30 frames a second; a double-speed CD-ROM player; and compatibility with existing music CDs and Kodak Photo CDs.

But rather than running the whole show based on a traditional microprocessor such as an Intel 80486 or a Motorola 68000-family chip, 3DO is employing a multitasking operating system that uses an advanced 32-bit RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computer) central processing unit. What this translates to, essentially, is that a highly detailed and animated scene in an adventure game can be rendered in startling clarity and realism while multiple items move and change shape, receive new light sources and shadows, and much more — all simultaneously, and all on the fly as you interact with the game.

More than a thousand people turned out for the 3DO press conference at CES, and from the eager response it was clear that 3DO was definitely ringing some bells and blowing some whistles.

Hawkins introduced the 3DO Interactive Multiplayer system on a raised platform in front of the crowd. Beside him were representatives from the heavy hitters that have formed the 3DO coalition: AT&T, Matsushita, Time Warner, MCA, and Electronic Arts. To have this group of companies in a single partnership such as 3DO is remarkable, and in the long run may have more to do with the success of the new standard than the terrific technology. Matsushita is the world's largest consumer electronics manufacturer, and has already said that it will market a 3DO machine under its Panasonic label. AT&T is, well, *AT&T!* — Ma Bell. Time Warner is the largest media company in the world, and the second largest cable operator in the U.S. MCA is a major entertainment company, and Electronic Arts is the leading entertainment software company. A heavy-hitting lineup.

Rather than trying to establish a monopoly on the hardware or software, the 3DO partners are promising to share the technology on what they describe as very reasonable terms in order to help establish it as a standard. In fact, Hawkins says that 3DO will not itself compete with those software publishers who develop software for the system, and there are already more than 80 companies signed up to develop software for 3DO.

Although CD-ROM will be the first delivery system for the Interactive Multiplayer, future products will almost surely include cable TV, video production, portable systems, education networks, and the like. When it first appears late this year, look for a $700 price tag — about the same retail price as Philips' CD-I, Tandy's VIS, and Commodore's CDTV players.

So, what's the bottom line for computer game players? Prepare to be astonished. You'll be interacting with environments and characters and digitized speech and motion picture-quality music, all in 3-D worlds that will be like nothing seen before. Sound too good to be true? Right now it is. When the system is introduced in its CD-ROM form late this year for an estimated $700, the first software is certain to be less well-developed than what we'll see one, two, and three years down the road. But make no mistake — 3DO is one giant step for game players.

— S.B.

COMPTON'S NEWMEDIA — TESTING NEW WATERS

In a surprise announcement at CES, CD-ROM publisher and distributor Compton's NewMedia introduced M.O.S.T. (Multiple Operating System Technology), a new CD format that allows a single CD-ROM disc to operate on several platforms: DOS, Windows (MPC), Macintosh, and Sony's new MMCD. The M.O.S.T. development was especially good news for distributors and retailers, who have expressed great concern over shelf-space availablity for the variety of CD-ROM formats now available. Compton's said that 50 M.O.S.T. titles would be shipping in the first quarter of 1993. The M.O.S.T. system can be licensed, a Compton's spokesperson noted.

In a separate announcement, Compton's explained a new strategy for getting CD-ROM into the retail channel — disc rental in video rental stores. In an agreement with Major Video Concepts (MVC), the second largest U.S. distributor of pre-recorded videocassettes, Compton's will usher 20 CD-ROM titles into selected rental outlets. MVC plans to provide point-of-purchase floor displays to allow customers to examine each CD-ROM package for rental or purchase. The initial 20 units are reference and entertainment titles.

—L.E.

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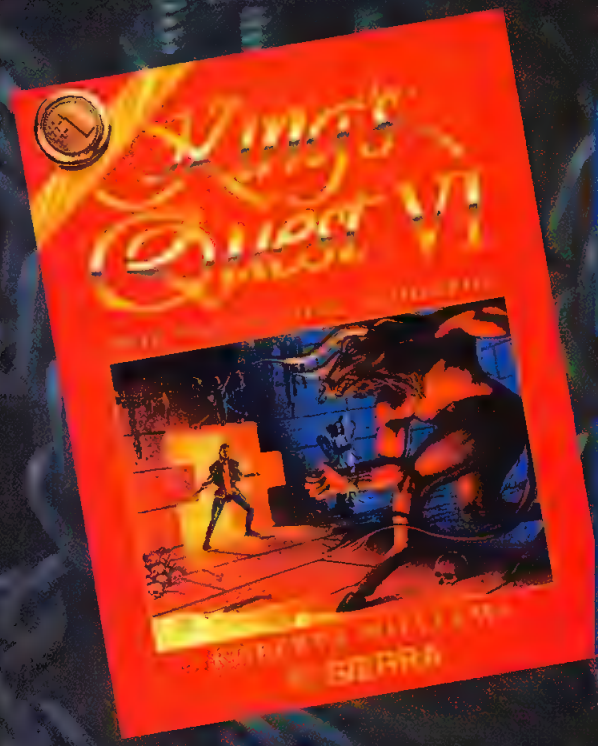

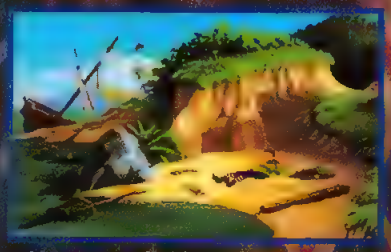

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Product Information Number 285

SVGA AIR WARRIOR

LEE BUCHANAN

Category: Air-Combat Simulation

Developer: Konami

Publisher: Kesmai

Rating:

There are more top-notch air-combat simulations available now than ever before. Thanks to faster PCs and better graphics, computer gamers are able to climb into the cockpits of aircraft from any era and wage war in incredibly realistic environments.

There's only one critical factor that these sims can't realistically duplicate — a truly intelligent opponent. No matter how sophisticated the artificial intelligence of that enemy fighter, an accomplished gamer can, given enough time, eventually figure out what maneuvers a computer opponent is going to employ and how's he's going to react in various situations.

The only way around that obstacle to realism, of course, is through modem-to-modem or network links that pit human opponents against each other in real-time computer air combat. The GEnie network is one system where gamers can fly with, and against, other people in real time with its Air Warrior simulation.

Until now, Air Warrior was available only as a "front-end" system for participating in air combat on line with GEnie. But with Konami's release of *SVGA Air Warrior* to software stores, off-line gamers can play a sophisticated, enhanced version of the on-line simulation.

Konami is up-front about *Air Warrior*'s true role: The game is billed as an off-line practice mode for gamers getting ready to do battle on GEnie. Buyers get a $50 usage credit on GEnie, and the game includes an excellent modem utility that logs you on to the service and takes you directly to Air Warrior.

For gamers already flying on-line or planning to subscribe to GEnie, *SVGA Air Warrior* is a must. The game gives you an excellent opportunity to practice maneuvers against computer opponents and learn the nuances of the various aircraft available on-line. Except for the absence of human opponents, the world in which you fly off-line is identical to the one you encounter in GEnie's Air Warrior.

As a stand-alone air-combat sim, however, *Air Warrior* doesn't quite match up with the best sims on the market. Although it performs quite well in its head-to-head modem play, the game was designed for network play.

SVGA Air Warrior is an enhancement over the front-end system previously used on GEnie, requiring Super VGA capability. The result is the best cockpit displays available anywhere. (Cockpit art is not included for some planes, particularly those from WWI, but more can be downloaded from GEnie.) But because the game was designed for maximum frame-rate in network play, other graphical refinements have been sacrificed. The ground has few details, and other planes aren't very sharply or colorfully rendered. Combat graphics are wonderful, though, with brilliant explosions punctuating a kill and flying chunks of debris a sign that you've been hit.

The gamer's perspective from the cockpit is rather small, due to the fact that the actual game display doesn't utilize the entire screen. While it's true that some extra space is necessary to allow room for text messages from other players when playing on-line, there's still quite a bit of unused screen space.

SVGA Air Warrior offers a wealth of aircraft which you can fly or fly against. From WWII, you can choose from nine fighters and seven bomb-

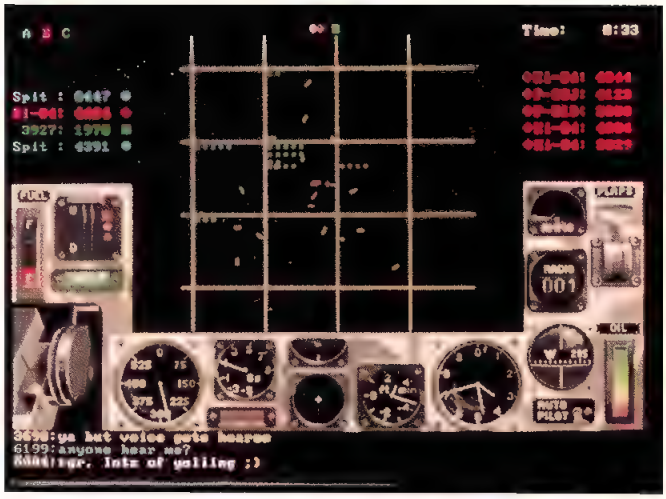
ers (bombers can be used only as targets when playing off-line). Throw in a few WWI planes, a couple of jets from Korea, and a variety of vehicles for ground targets, and you have a wide range of possibilities.

Similar to *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*, this game allows you to pit aircraft from different eras against one another. So if you're really sadistic, you can fly an F-86 Sabre jet against a Sopwith Camel. But unlike *Yeager*, there are no mission scenarios in the off-line version of *Air Warrior*. You just choose what planes you and your opponents will fly, select starting airfields, then take off in search of the enemy. The two small maps, representing theaters in Europe and the Pacific, consist only of airfields, mountains, and bodies of water. And there are no wingmen available in the off-line version; again, you have to go on-line to fly with friendlies. In short, strategic concerns and career options are nonexistent in *Air Warrior*.

Once you get into the cockpit, though, *Air Warrior* shows off its strength as a combat flight-sim. Sound effects are outstanding, with each plane's engines a digital recreation of the

real thing — fire up the Spitfire (one of our favorites), and you hear the engine sputter and then roar to life. Each plane's engines sound different, and they're thrilling to hear.

After takeoff, the game again shows some kinship to *Yeager* in its realistic flight dynamics. There's a ton of realism options which can be toggled, including buffeting, accelerated stalls, and spins. Using all these options, flight dynamics are lethally unforgiving in *Air Warrior*. If you're used to throwing your plane around the sky without regard for realistic dynamics (as you can with several other best-selling sims), you're in for a rude surprise in *Air Warrior*.



Although the display is small, there's a great variety of perspectives from inside the cockpit. The six main views can be used in combination, allowing for dozens of perspectives from the cockpit, including a curious crotch-view of the pilot's lap. The radar view, on the other hand, is somewhat cluttered and difficult to read.

The physical world of *Air Warrior* is very limited, mainly because it's identical to the one found on-line. In each of the two theaters, there are three countries containing airfields, factories, vehicle garages, factories, and a capital city. Aircraft carriers also are included in the Pacific theater.

While *Air Warrior* does have some shortcomings as an off-line air-combat sim, it could be argued that the game isn't really *meant* to be played off-line. In particular, the box notes describe it as "the training school for on-line air-combat duty against GEnie Air Warrior veterans." But *Air Warrior* is being sold in stores, and will surely be purchased by consumers unaware that it's weakest as a stand-alone product.

Log onto GEnie, though, and you'll see *Air Warrior* really take off. In the world of air-combat games, nothing equals the challenge of taking on another human player in real time. Even gamers who've racked up big kill numbers in other sims are likely to get their tails waxed the first few times out against veteran pilots on GEnie.

Aspects of the game which seem frustratingly limited off-line really blossom when you join the on-line war. For example, bombers can't even be flown by players in the off-line version. But on GEnie, you can join a bomber crew made up of real people.

Each airfield has a briefing room where you can challenge other players to duels or join in missions. A training center is available, and veteran pilots are usually glad to help you learn the ropes — then delight in flaming you as soon as you tangle.

Communicating with friends and foes via text messages is a breeze, as long as you can type while flying a plane. You can coordinate attacks with wingmen or curse your opponent; messages from headquarters alert players that airfields are under attack.

With its SVGA graphics and accurate flight modeling, *Air Warrior* has some strengths as an off-line flight simulator, but it has weaknesses that prevent us from unconditionally recommending it as a stand-alone product unless you can take advantage of the head-to-head modem option. In the skies of GEnie's Air Warrior, however, this game really soars.

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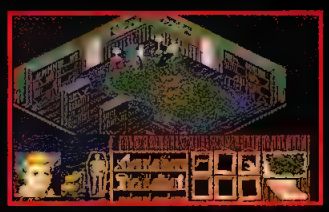

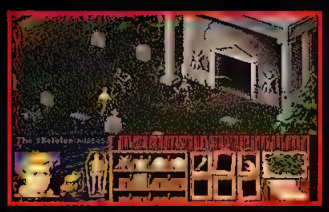

IBM 256-color VGA

Product Information Number 315

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WORLD CIRCUIT

TIM VICTOR

Category: Racing Situation

Publisher: MicroProse

Developer: MicroProse

Rating:

Each of the 16 tracks is a cipher, a minute-and-a-half-long puzzle in time and space, its solution a precisely rehearsed sequence of braking, shifting, steering, and accelerating. In high-speed turns, a Formula One car is pulled by a force four times greater than gravity. The screaming engine applies 750 horsepower to a vehicle half the weight of a Honda Civic. Pistons thrust 400 times a second, faster than a rifle bullet; 60 m.p.h. comes before you can inhale, 100 m.p.h. a heartbeat later.

Once it's in your blood, you're hooked. Early in his professional career, reigning World Driving Champion Nigel Mansell mortgaged his

house to finance one more season of racing, one more chance to reach the next rung on the Formula One ladder. Countless other drivers have made similar gambles and lost, never getting the chance to compete at the highest level of international motorsports.

This is the world MicroProse attempts to re-create in *World Circuit*, and the result is an attractive game that's both realistic and engaging. Four types of games are available: a complete championship season, a non-championship race event, a quick race, and unlimited practice.

The championship season includes an event at each of 16 tracks, in the order of the 1991 World Championship. Each race is preceded by two practice periods and a qualifying session to determine starting position. You can skip any of these, but you'll start at the back of the field if you pass on qualifying.

The game's setup options allow you to adjust the length of races, practices, and qualifying sessions, but regardless of any tweaking you do a championship season is still quite an undertaking. You can save games to disk to spread your championship over several days. For a shorter game, a non-championship event is like one of the race events in the championship, on the track of your choice. A quick race is even more brief, dispensing with the practice and qualifying sessions.

Germany - Hockenheim
POS N DRIVER LAPTIME SET
1 6 Luigi Rivellini 1 37 572 1
2 27 Jean Paul Cassell 1 37 835 1
3 4 Mario Innocenti 1 39 249 1
4 23 Pietro Rosellini 1 39 387 1
5 32 Nico Napoli 1 39 465 2
6 2 Kurt Langer 1 39 533 1
TIME: 02 mins
Cars out:
x1000 RPM

World Circuit has a smooth learning curve, featuring five levels of competition from Rookie to Pro. A variety of driving aids are available at the Rookie level: auto brakes, to reduce speed before each turn; auto shifting, to match engine speed to road speed; self-righting spins, which points the car back toward the pavement if you leave the track; indestructibility; a visible "best line" around the track, displayed as a white line on the road; and a suggested gear display on the dashboard, useful once you disable auto shifting.

With all the aids enabled, you can play the game as an exciting arcade-style diversion, one that doesn't require too big an investment of time. Just steer around the track and try to pass the other cars.

After a few hours of play at the rookie level, most players will find that they can win races pretty easily. Stiffer competition is available at the higher difficulty levels, but you'll have to know the tracks very well first since driving aids are gradually disabled as you increase the difficulty level.

Practicing at rookie level is one of the best ways to master a circuit. The fast way around the track can be seen by observing braking points, gear selections, and the all-important line through each turn. Each driving aid can be temporarily disabled while in motion by pressing a function key.

In keeping with the emphasis on realism, there's no track editor in *World Circuit*, so you're limited to the 16 authentic circuits included. Likewise, there's only one basic car available, though its performance can be modified to some extent by changing tires, gears, and wing settings.

Real-life drivers rely on many different inputs and sensations when controlling a car, including the self-centering force in the steering wheel and the tugs at the seat of his or her

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IBM® PC and Compatibles 5.25" (1.2 MB) or 3.5" (1.44 MB) disks enclosed. Requires: DOS 5.0, 286-12 or higher, 1 MB RAM, VGA Graphics, Hard Disk, and MS-compatible Mouse. Sound Support: PC Speaker, AdLib™ and Sound Blaster™ ©1993 Merit Software. Maelstrom is a trademark owned by Don Bluth Multimedia, Inc. All characters, audio, visuals and concept ©1992 Don Bluth Multimedia, Inc. – ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Programming ©1992 PAS Systems – ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Product Information Number 220

pants. Without this non-visual feedback, driving games are often very difficult to control. Fortunately, *World Circuit* features a smooth, sensitive joystick interface, so keeping the car on the road isn't unnecessarily difficult.

There are plenty of menu options to change the con- trols for functions like shifting and braking. These can be assigned to alternate joystick buttons, or control can be split between the joystick and the keyboard, though the default setup

worked fine with the joystick we used. Options for mouse and keyboard control are also provided, but they're less satisfying than the joystick.

World Circuit requires an 8MHz 286 processor or better, but on this class of machine the performance is just barely acceptable. If you're running the game on such a system, you can speed things up by choosing the lowest detail setting, resulting in relatively smooth animation — if you're the only car on the track. But when several other cars are visible on the screen during a race, the display can get quite choppy. Naturally, a 486-class machine produces much better performance, delivering a smoothly animated display under any race conditions.

The game also requires a hard disk and a VGA display for the 256-color graphics. *World Circuit* installs easily, taking up a little over 2 MB of disk space with the smallest installation option. If you can spare the extra space, two larger options add some extra animation sequences to the program, but don't affect the actual races.

While not as hungry for conventional memory as some programs, *World Circuit* might require a boot floppy with a simple configuration if your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files load a lot of drivers and resident utilities.

The installation program gives three options for sound support: Ad Lib, Sound Blaster, and PC speaker. We were somewhat disappointed with the game's use of sound cards, especially in comparison to the full-blooded roar heard in driving games like *Stunts*. We found that the PC's built-in speaker actually gives the rawest, most exhilarating engine note, reminiscent of the in-car audio in ESPN's Grand Prix broadcasts.

It's perhaps fitting that *World Circuit* was developed in Britain, since most of the real-world Formula One teams have a British base of operations. The few instances of Britspeak that show up in the game and manual — like "petrol" for gasoline or "rev counter" for tachometer — don't present any problem. In fact, hardcore Grand Prix fans accustomed to following the season's progress in English magazines like *Autosport* might even find this charming. (Curiously, the American spelling of "tire" shows up more often than the British "tyre.")

MicroProse didn't acquire a license to use the actual names of Formula One drivers and teams in the game, most likely to avoid a considerable expense (although they do appear in the manual). In their place, substitute names are used, usually of the same nationality and often with the same number of syllables. This isn't a problem at all, since editing in any names you like is a snap.

With its smooth and sensitive joystick interface, accurate tracks, and realistic vehicle dynamics, it's easy to spend countless hours playing *World Circuit*, battling for the lead through the streets of Monte Carlo, or just trying to perfect the timing of the brake-down-shift-apex sequence through the *Variante Ascari* at Monza.

To anyone who's ever blown several years' savings to buy and campaign a race car, or spent a month of evenings chasing the lap record at Malibu Grand Prix (this reviewer belonging to both clubs), the high addiction quotient of fast driving goes without saying. *World Circuit* does a fantastic job of bringing that excitement to your PC, taking the pole position for racing sims in the process.

GP

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Product Information Number 415

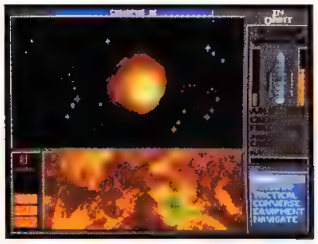
STAR CONTROL II

MATTHEW A. FIRME

Category: Sci-Fi Adventure/ Role-Playing
Publishe: Accolade

Developer: Accolade

Rating:

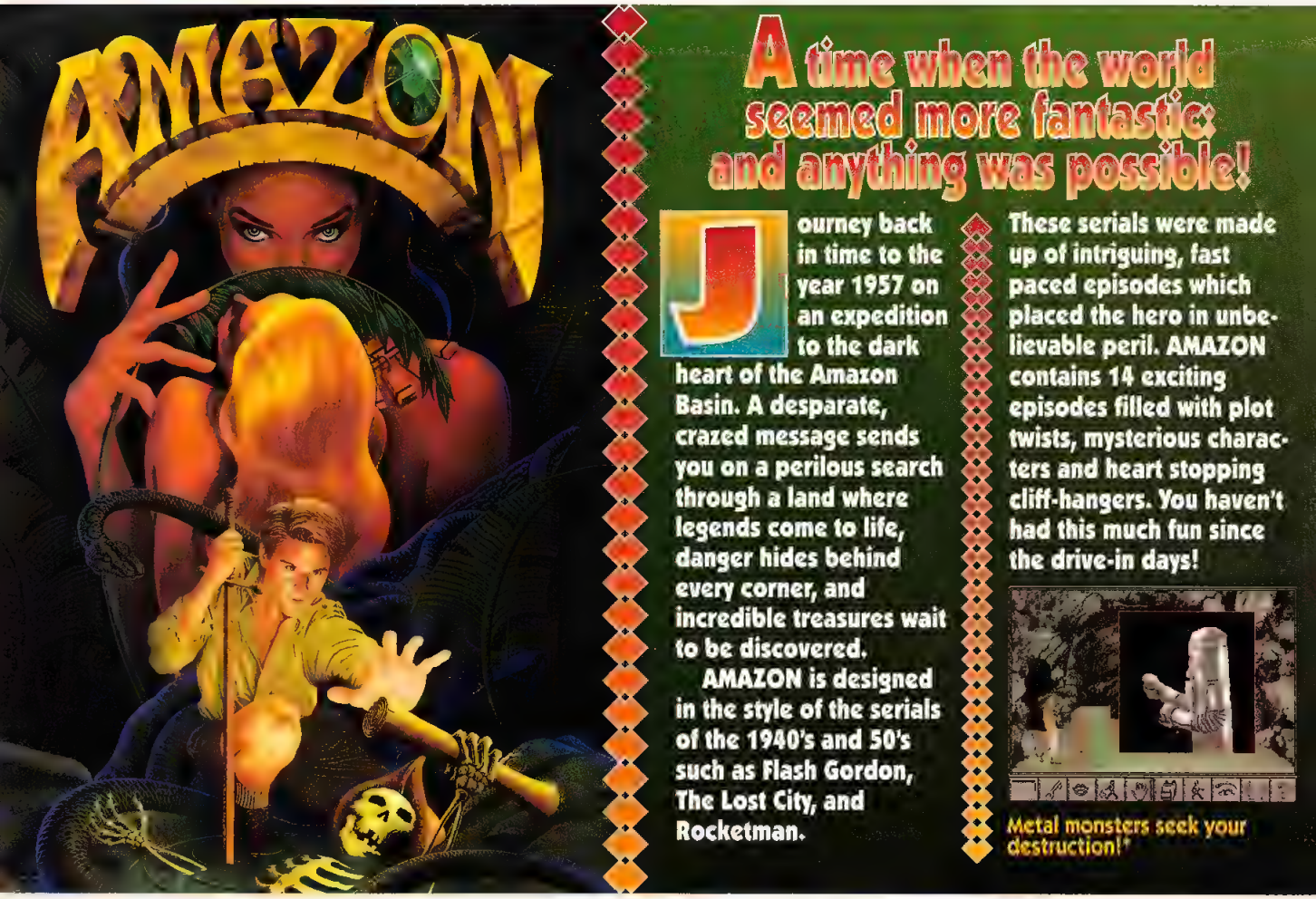


The original *Star Control* told the story of Earth's dramatic realization that mankind wasn't alone in the universe. There was life out there — lots of it, and not all friendly.

A strange race called the Chenjesu appeared near Earth to warn that the Ur-Quan Hierarchy — a conglomerate of the vile and power-hungry Ur-Quan and their numerous slave races — was nearing the Solar system. The Chenjesu represented the Alliance of Free Stars, and offered the people of Earth a simple choice: join the Alliance, or succumb to Ur-Quan domination.

The stage was set for a pan-galactic battle between good and evil, and *Star Control* allowed you to play out this drama in two stages. First, you could choose to play a sort of chess game on an intergalactic scale, set against a revolving, 3-D star field. Playing as either the Alliance or the Hierarchy, you moved your ships from star to star, "capturing" strategic sectors and reinforcing them with the most powerful vessels under your command. When you and the enemy both directed a ship into the same star system, those two ships would battle head-to-head.

This second part of the game actually puts you in command of your side's ship in a sophisticated, arcade-style sequence. Because each of the 14 vessels (seven per side, and each designed and piloted by a different race) had its own distinctive weapons, defenses, and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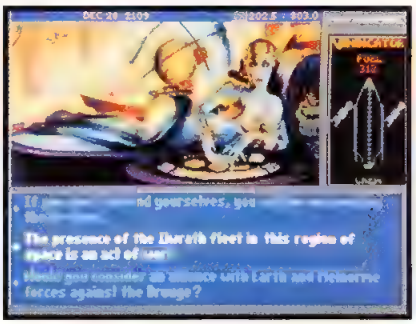
flight characteristics, every battle held unique surprises.

While the combat portion of *Star Control* was immensely satisfying, the strategic aspect left a lot to be desired. Not that it was bad: it just wasn't *enough*. You never got to know the alien cultures in the game, and weren't given the opportunity to learn more about the struggle you were taking part in. These very enticing details were relegated to background status, when in truth they just *begged* to take center stage.

Now, in *Star Control II (SCII)*, the groundwork of exotic cultures and epic struggle laid by *Star Control* is fully realized. Decades have passed since Earth first joined the Alliance



of Free Stars; the Alliance has been crushed, and now Earth lies beneath an Ur-Quan slave shield, its inhabitants thralls to their Ur-Quan masters. The Chenjesu have disappeared and the other Alliance races have returned to their homeworlds, hoping to somehow avoid conquest by the Ur-Quan.

But one pocket of Humanity remains free — the people of Vela II. Before the Ur-Quan conquered Earth, an expedition was sent to Vela II to investigate the discovery of an ancient technology. The expedition was marooned, though, when the Ur-Quan moved toward Earth. As time passed, the expedition colonized Vela II, renaming their planet Unzervalt. After discovering a way to build a spaceship from the ancient technology they discovered, they decided to send the ship on a reconnaissance mission to discover what had become of Earth.

And that's where you come in.

As *Star Control II* begins, your vessel hangs at the edge of the Solar system. You pilot in and find Earth cloaked in the slave shield. A starbase orbits the planet, but its commander isn't eager to chat. He knows that the Ur-Quan masters are aware of your presence, and that talking with renegade humans could bring death.

Your immediate task, then, is to secure the commander's trust. And ultimately, you must reassemble the members of the old Alliance and destroy the Ur-Quan.

Sound like a tall order? It is. The *SC II* galaxy is made up of hundreds of stars, most with entire planetary systems you can scan and explore. And everywhere you go, alien races

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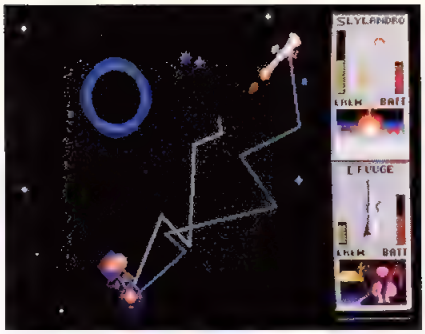
Product Information Number 101

have staked claims to sections of the galaxy, so on any voyage you might meet a new ally, or a new enemy. Best of all, the game's clean and well-planned design makes this grand-scale adventure seem epic, yet thankfully manageable.

You navigate by using a starmap, setting your waypoint and auto-piloting to it. All travel between star systems is done in hyperspace: The normally black void turns red and your ship moves, faster than light, toward its destination. A radar display shows your ship and any other vessels in the area, allowing you either to seek them out or to avoid them, while the close-up screen gives a tight view of the action. Alien craft appear as bubbles in hyperspace, so you're never sure what you're dealing with until your respective vessels collide and fall into normal space for a confrontation.

These meetings bring you



face-to-face with the aliens of *SC II*. Unlike the first game, in which the personalities and motivations of the aliens were largely left to imagination, *SC II* gives you fully-realized characterizations. Using a "select the right response" interface, you'll converse with over a dozen memorable races, from the cowardly Spathi to the foul Druuge traders. More than just adding depth and texture to the game, these characters, their histories, and their knowledge all dovetail to create a seamless and plausible reality. Plus, the aliens are just chock full of clues you'll need to finish the game.

You'll need more than clues, though, to see the game through to the end. You'll need money. Although your ancient, alien vessel was able to get you safely to Earth, it's hardly up to the rigors ahead of you. It's not fast enough, maneuverable enough, and it doesn't have the weaponry you'll need for those unavoidable confrontations. Once you establish relations with the Earth starbase, they'll be able to better outfit your vessel. But first you must secure enough Resource Units (RUs), the currency of *SC II*.

RUs are earned by gathering minerals from the surface of planets. You have a landing craft aboard your ship for just this purpose, as well as a sophisticated sensor system that lets

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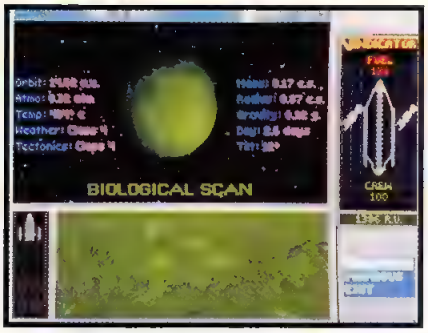

you scan a planet for life, minerals, and energy sources. Of course, not all planets are created equal—some are just lousy with rare elements, while others are covered with common rock of little value. And a planet's climate and tectonics make landing risky; lose your lander to an earthquake or lightning strike, and you've just thrown 500 RUs down the drain. There are ways to reinforce your landers using alien technology (see the Melnorme, a pleasant race of merchants who frequent giant-class stars).

If this planet-landing, mineral-searching stuff sounds suspiciously like Electronic Arts' older *Starflight* games, you're right. And that's no wonder, since key *Starflight* designers worked on this project, too. And while there are other similarities, *SC II* is a much richer, nicer-looking, and more involving game.

One reason *SC II* is so involving is the way it handles combat. Although this sequel features many improvements over the original, starship battles aren't changed at all. You take control of your souped-up alien vessel, or the vessels of any allies you've made, as you go head-to-head against the bad guys. Watching the action from a top-down view, you maneuver your ship to take advantage of your opponent's weaknesses and avoid his strengths. It's arcade-style action, but of a sophisticated type—and the outcome of your battle is often as important to the overall game as any of the role-playing or exploring aspects.

Of course, arcade-style fighting isn't for everyone, and so *SC II*'s designers included an option that allows the computer to handle combat for you. My advice, though, is to fight your own battles. Once you get the hang of it, the satisfaction you'll derive from blasting your first Ur-Quan Dreadnought just can't be beat. There's even a Melee option, allowing you to do nothing but fight—either to hone your skills, or for the sheer joy of the kill.

Incidentally, the joystick you use for combat will be your control device throughout the game. You can use your keyboard, of course, but there's no mouse support, despite the fact that several game functions are perfectly suited for pointing and clicking. I played using a Gravis PC GamePad, and found it to be ideal for the combination combat/game control this game demands.

Another incidental: You'll probably spend a lot of time with *SC II*. There's so much to do—so many planets to explore and mysteries to solve and battles to fight—that the game may dominate your spare time for quite a while. And when you finally finish, when you crush the loathsome Ur-Quan and free the galaxy, don't be surprised if you find yourself wishing the game were a bit longer. Fortunately, the ending *does* leave room for a *Star Control III*. With any luck, that project's already underway.

GP

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Product Information Number 216

BATTLES OF DESTINY

LEE BUCHANAN

Category: Military Strategy

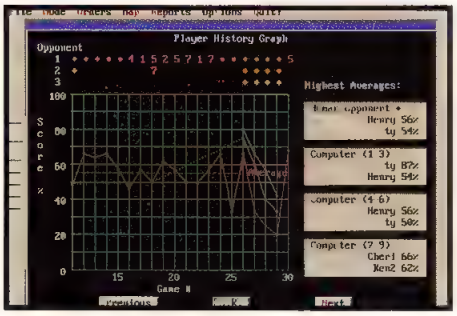
Publisher: QQP

Developer: Several Holistic Dudes

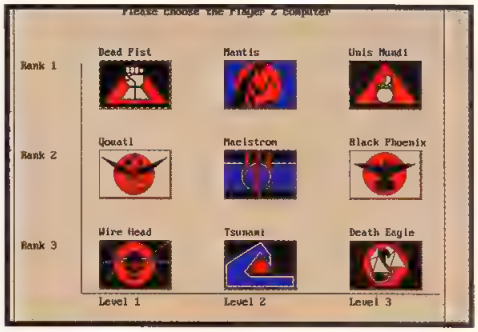
Rating:

Gamers looking for new worlds to conquer will welcome the release of *Battles of Destiny*, the latest game of military strategy and tactics from QQP. *Battles of Destiny* pits you against up to three human or computer players in a futuristic contest for world supremacy. The graphics won't blow you away, but like most QQP games, *Battles of Destiny* boasts a flexible gaming system and computer opponents with outstanding artificial intelligence, a combination that should keep players interested for a long time.

Like QQP's other games (*The Perfect General*, *The Lost Admiral*, and *Conquered Kingdoms*) *Battles of Destiny* offers modem play for a true test of strategic planning against another human opponent. Although some players may become frustrated waiting to receive an opponent's moves during the turn-based modem play, *Battles* is unquestionably at its best when you hook up with a friend or two to see who's *really* the grand strategist and tactician.



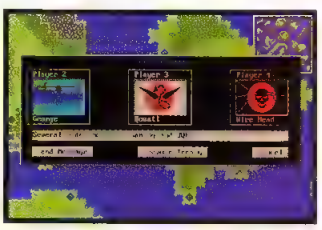
The worlds are fictional and the time is futuristic, but the basic principles of conquest are universal and timeless. Starting with a handful of cities that serve as production centers for the player's military machine, the player must choose what forces to build and how to deploy them.



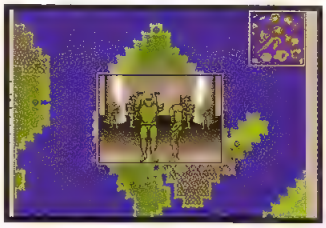
There are 21 types of units available, including infantry, artillery, armor, tank destroyers, jet fighters, bombers, patrol boats, destroyers, battleships, aircraft carriers, transports, radar and missiles. Naturally, all units have different strengths and weaknesses, and each is vulnerable against certain enemy units.

Obviously, the production centers are critical to success. These cities manufacture the weapons and materials necessary to crush your neighbor, so their defense is imperative; lose one of these cities, and you lose both a strategic location and a chunk of your war production. Each city can operate at one of six levels of production, increasing its output until it reaches the maximum. Sufficient damage from enemy attacks can shut down production centers until they're repaired.

You can play against three other armies, comprised of any combination of human and computer opponents. Players may choose one of three methods for determining game length of the individual scenarios — a set number of turns, achieving a certain number of victory points, or playing until all but one player has been defeated.



Outstanding artificial intelligence of computer opponents is a hallmark of QQP games, and that strength is very evident in *Battles of Destiny*. Computer opponents are remarkably adept at strategic placement of units and reacting to a human player's moves. In fact, if you're winning against two or three computer armies, the bad guys will team up against you.



The relative strengths of the computer and human players can be adjusted on a percentage basis, making it possible for players at any skill level to enjoy a satisfying challenge. In addition, you can choose the base strength level of computer opponents.

Game play is divided into four phases: combat report, production, message receipt (for modem play) and action/combat. The combat report alerts you to any enemy attacks that occurred since your last turn. Next, the production screen appears either when you've captured a city or when one of your cities has produced

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The name of the game

ocean

Ocean of America, Inc. 1855 O'Toole Ave., Suite D-102 San Jose, CA 95131

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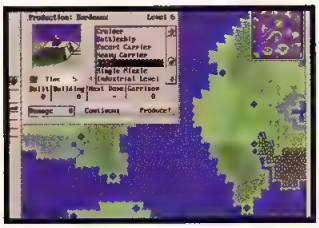
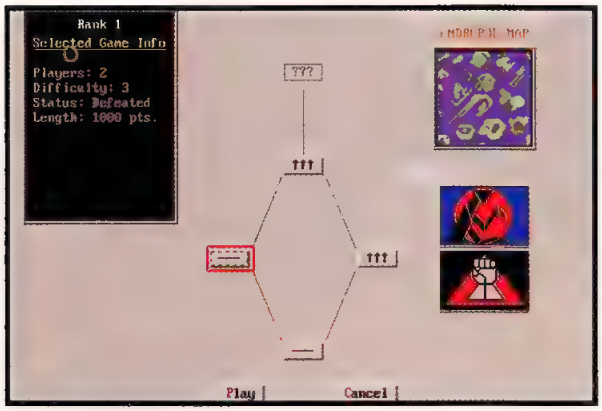


a unit and is waiting for new production orders. (Production centers also can be ordered to continually produce one type of unit.) The message receipt phase lets you know if your modem opponent has sent you a message since the last turn. Finally, the combat phase resolves battles if units come into contact with one another or with opposing cities.

Movement of units couldn't be easier. Just click on the spot where you'd like a unit to move to and it continues to move in that direction, turn after turn, until it reaches its destination. (The terrain represented in the game — grass, hills, forests, mountains, swamps, and water — affects both movement and defensive/offensive capabilities of the various units.) If the unit spots an enemy unit, it will



stop and wait for your orders. Units can be ordered to patrol, moving to a destination to search for the enemy and then returning to the starting location. Another nice touch in unit movement is the ability to simultaneously move several units stacked in the same space.

You also have full control over other actions of the units. Units can be ordered to load onto sea transports, refuel, repair themselves, or dig in at a defensive position.

The basic unit is infantry, useful for occupying cities and establishing defensive positions. Tanks, the most powerful land-based unit in the game, can be mass-produced for a blitzkrieg offensive. Artillery can be used to shell targets up to six squares away, and intelligent planning of artillery fire is a critical component in a coordinated attack.

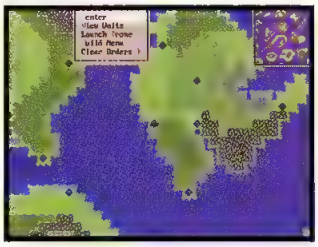
Fighter aircraft are important for establishing air superiority, a necessity for transporting armor and ground troops, as well as giving your bombers free reign for attacks on naval units and artillery. Air transport units play a key role in any offensive strategy, giving a commander the ability to quickly attack vulnerable points in the enemy's defense. Naval units range from patrol boats to battleships and aircraft carriers, and all can be important factors in a coordinated offensive strategy.

Combat in *Battles of Destiny* is simple yet varied. If you concentrate on producing only a few types of units, you'll be crushed quickly. The key to victory here is using a combination of the different types of unit to conquer cities. And the more cities you own, the more units you produce.

So while an aggressive offensive posture is a key to survival in this cutthroat world, you have many choices when deciding the scale and direction of your attacks. Do you opt for an all-out assault on a huge front, or try to isolate production centers in the interior? Or how about an end-around amphibious assault to cut the enemy in half? The call is yours,

but be prepared: computer opponents react quickly — and intelligently — to your maneuvers. It's the computer opponents' ability to adapt to the player's strategy that makes *Battles of Destiny* richly challenging and thoroughly replayable.

An excellent information screen supplies you with all the information you need to wage war — the number of production centers for each player, the types of units being produced, when production



will be completed, the number of victory points each player has accumulated, and the relative strength of each player. Another welcome feature is a player history report that tracks your successes and failures.

The graphics in *Battles of Destiny* aren't the sort that you you'd use to show off your PC to your friends, but they are attractive, and serve their purpose. A few animated sequences pop up every now and then, including a shot of your victorious troops (they look a bit like Ninja turtles) whenever they conquer an opposing city. As with most strategic level computer games, sound effects are minimal, though there is a nice clashing sound when battles occur.

Although *Battles of Destiny* was created out of house by Several Holistic Dudes, it carries on QQP's tradition of well-conceived and beautifully executed strategy games. If you have a taste for world domination, and think you have the shrewdness to forge dozens of different units into a powerful military machine, then *Battles of Destiny* could very well the challenge you've been searching for.

GP

BATTLES OF DESTINY

Conquer the world in "Battles of Destiny." Seek out and destroy up to three opponents in this state of the art global conquest simulation. It's simple to play, but only a true master will reign in "Battles of Destiny."

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The "Battles of Destiny" computer game is IBM PC. It can be obtained through your favorite retailer or ordered direct by calling:

1-908-788-2799

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Product Information Number 265

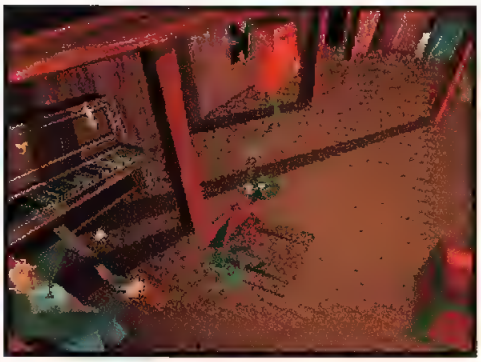
ALONE IN THE DARK

STEPHEN POOLE

Category: Horror/Graphic Adventure
Publisher: I-Motion
Developer: Virtual Dreams
Rating:

I don't know about you, but I *like* hoisting a shotgun, squeezing the trigger, and watching a ghoul reel backward from the impact. I get a kick out of using a sword to teach a hellhound that, yes, there *are* bad dogs. Heck, I even enjoy stretching out a demon with a right cross and a front snap-kick.

If any of this sounds appealing, then run, don't walk, to your nearest software store and pick up a copy of *Alone in the Dark*. It's a horror game for the rest of us, in more ways than one: Unlike *The 7th Guest*, you don't need a CD-ROM drive and a 486 to run it; unlike both *Elvira* games, you needn't worry about FRP mechanics — such as mixing potions and casting spells — in order to play it; and unlike *Waxworks* and *Dark Seed*, there's no graphic "shell" taking up a big portion of your computer screen and decreasing the size of the actual viewing display.



The narrative leading up to the game proper is simple and refreshingly open-ended. Jeremy Hartwood, an artist whose obsession with the supernatural has fueled his increasingly bizarre works, has committed suicide inside his mansion home, Derceto. You can play as either Jeremy's niece, Emily, or the down-on-his-luck private investigator Edward Carnby. As Emily, you're driven to explore Derceto, Hartwood's mansion home, in an attempt to discover the reason behind your uncle's suicide; as Carnby, you've been hired to make an inventory of the contents of the house.

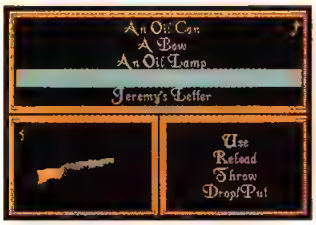
And that's it. Once inside, your only real goal is to get out alive. It doesn't take you long to realize the fix you're in, either; a demon dog bursts through the attic window within minutes of your arrival, followed quickly by a bipedal ghoul. The entire house, in fact, has been imbued with and surrounded by evil spirits — even the trees in the front yard are your enemies — so getting out alive necessarily entails learning the history of Derceto and its former inhabitants.

The concept of being imprisoned inside an evil house has been used in dozens of horror movies, and *Alone in the Dark* succeeds wildly in creating the nervous, claustrophobic terror of being both trapped and pursued. Why? Because of the smart design decisions and unique, inventive approaches taken by Virtual Dreams, the French-based development group responsible for the game.

In contrast to *Waxworks* and the *Elvira* games, there's no graphic window per se in *Alone in the Dark*, nor is the display enclosed by a "picture frame" as in *Dark Seed*. The entire screen is used to display your character and his or her surroundings, giving you a sense of intimate realism impossible with a graphic shell.

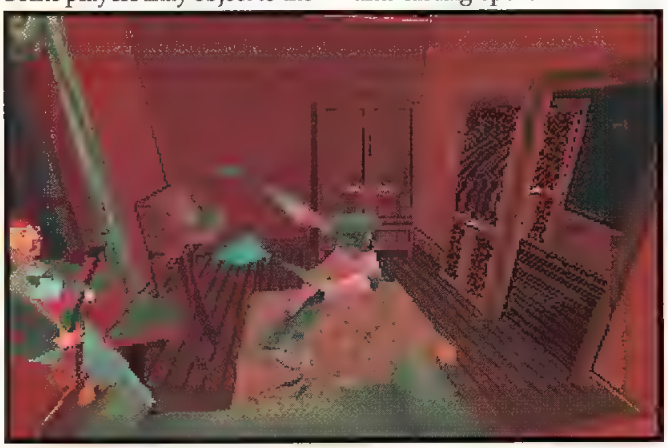
To maintain that uncluttered look, *Alone in the Dark* uses a separate screen for examining and using inventory items. Just press Enter, and the action in the game freezes while you examine your inventory or select an action, such as Fight, Open/Search, Use (for inventory items), Push, or Jump. (Interplay, who's handling American distribution for I-Motion, tells us that hot keys for actions will be included in the final version.)

As you move around a room, your perspective switches among as many as nine different vantage points. You may have an oblique, three-quarters rear view as you enter a kitchen closet, for example, but once inside, the "camera" switches to a view looking up from the floor. It's true that some of the perspectives aren't conducive to combat (a problem that could be solved by allowing you to switch to a default



view when tangling with nasties). But the cinematic effect is startling and evocative: *Alone in the Dark* brings us one step closer to the promise of "interactive movies."

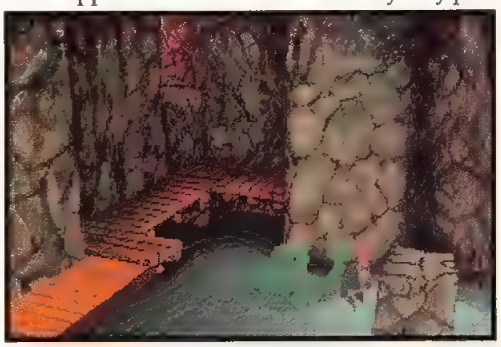
All the 3-D characters and creatures in the game were created with polygon graphics. Some players may object to the



blocky, triangular look of both Edward and Emily, but a very strong argument can be made that any sacrifice in visual aesthetics is more than compensated for by the stunningly lifelike animation. The 3-D ghouls roaming the corridors and rooms of Derceto, on the other hand, are wonderfully frightening, with their green arms outstretched as they slowly and inexorably shuffle toward you.

And when they shuffle toward you, your options are varied and satisfying. We've been told by Interplay that it's possible to win the game without killing any of the monsters, but what fun is there in flight when you've got some *real* weapons at your disposal? Forget about mixing potions and casting spells: You find a rifle early on, then a sword, then a pair of knives, then a snub-nose revolver...well, you get the idea. I've always been drawn to B-grade horror movies in which a pistol is as good as (or better than) a prayer at taking care of demons and zombies, and the two-fisted, two-barrelled approach to combat in *Alone in the Dark* gives the game an intense arcade element you won't find in other adventures.

But while clearing Derceto of ambulatory creatures means you have free run of most of the house, there are other spirits here — hideous, ancient forces that can only be defeated by following up on every clue, reading every book and letter, and exploring the *entire* mansion. Though you'll naturally pick up every object you come across, you can't carry *everything* you find, and there are plenty of items which serve no practical purpose. The best course is to drop any item which appears to have only one purpose: once you unlock a door or chest, for instance, you no longer need that key. If you make the wrong decision, you can always retrieve an object.



The digitized sound effects — howling beasts, creaking doors, groaning demons, clanking swords, and of course the gratifying *crack!* of a rifle report — are good enough to make you jump out of your chair. (The game also supports Disney's Sound Source, with surprisingly good results.)

You can play *Alone in the Dark* on a 286, but the animation *will* be choppy. For the most part I experienced decent game play on my 16 MHz 386/SX, but ran into trouble during a couple of tricky action sequences where fluid animation is an absolute must. On a 386/25, the game ran beautifully.

Ah, I know what you're thinking: "This game does *everything* right!" Well, in my mind there's only one major flaw: There are only seven save-game slots. The number of saves is limited because each one is accompanied by a "snapshot" of your location. You can get around the seven-game limit by copying the easily recognizable save-game files to disk and then saving over your games, but that's awfully cumbersome. This is a *big* game — I spent around 35 hours with it — and I'd personally rather do away with the pretty picture (which doesn't help much once you've explored the whole house and you're just roaming from spot to spot) and have more save-game slots. There.

Horror buffs will immediately realize that *Alone in the Dark* was inspired by the works of H.P. Lovecraft. My only previous encounters with Lovecraft came in the form of several so-so movies (*The Dunwich Horror*, *Re-Animator*, and *The Unnameable*), a few short stories I read during high school, and pre-*Ziggy Stardust* David Bowie albums in which he muses on the Lovecraftian concept of an ancient race that's too evil to contemplate, much less invoke. I'd never been too impressed with H.P., but after finishing *Alone in the Dark* I'm ready to give him another try. Hey, imagine that — a computer game that encourages you to read a book! Maybe there's more hope for the future than I thought.

GP

FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL

LEE BUCHANAN

Category: Sports

Publisher: Dynamix

Developer: Dynamix

Rating:

Put on the pads, tighten your chin strap and get ready for some bone-crunching football action! Dynamix's *Front Page Sports: Football*, voted *PC Entertainment*'s Best Sports Game for 1992, delivers the sights and sounds of football in such a stunning fashion that even the most devoted gridiron fanatic may be tempted to turn off the television on Sunday afternoon.

But as good as *FPSF* is in its on-field action — and it is *very* good — it's the multitude of career options that will keep your football fever running high for quite a while. Injuries and retirements mean you'll be

forced to make tough decisions on trades and substitutions, and an annual college draft ensures that team rosters will undergo changes much as in real pro football. It's these sorts of parameters that allow you to create your own constantly evolving football world.

A word of warning: *FPSF* certainly represents the state-of-the-art in computer sports gaming, but you'll need a state-of-the-art computer to run it. The minimum hardware platform for *FPSF* is a 386-SX with 640K of RAM (you'll need to be running under DOS 5.0), but on such a system you can expect choppy and sluggish animation, even with much of the on-field detail turned off. Although it runs better on a fast 386, *FPSF* was meant for a 486. If you have enough computing muscle at your disposal, *FPSF* stands apart from some very tough competition among computer football games.

The on-field graphics and animation are the best yet seen in a PC football game. Runners spin and use a stiff-arm to evade tacklers. Receivers dive for the football and tacklers dive for receivers. Defenders are blocked to the ground, then get up to pursue the ball carrier. The pocket collapses around the quarterback, who gets the pass off just as he's hit. These stunning graphics can be viewed from several perspectives: a TV-like view from either side of the field or from behind either team. You can always check out an instant replay after the whistle, and the game saves highlight plays from each season contest.

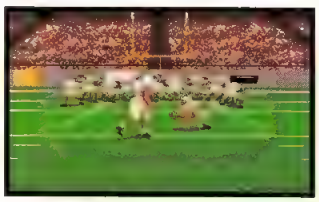
More than with any other team sport, sound effects are crucial to bringing a football simulation to life. In this department, too, *FPSF* succeeds beautifully, with gut-wrenching sounds of tackles and colliding shoulder pads. And when an infraction occurs, the ref's calls are announced with digitized speech.

The graphics and sound effects alone are enough to recommend *FPSF*. But the heart of this game lies in its team-management capabilities — and that's where it leaves the competition behind. In *FPSF*, you must decide much more than whether to run or pass — you must build and maintain a roster that changes with every year.

After the champions are crowned at the end of a season, the teams take part in a draft of college players, looking to strengthen rosters and fill the holes left by injuries, retirements, and free agency. There's no two ways about it — you're going to lose players at the end of the season, no matter how well or poorly your team finishes. Win the championship, for example, and your star quarterback might think it's a good time to hang up his cleats; finish at the bottom of your division, and he might decide to move on to a better team.

That's the beauty of *FPSF* — and what separates this remarkable game from other football simulations. The real challenge is to build a team of your own design, through the draft, trades, and signing of free agents. The players, apparently patterned after real NFL players, have fictional names. You can edit the names and skills any way you like for an exhibition game, but *FPSF* doesn't allow you to change player data for a full season. (There are now third-party programs available which allow player editing and provide real NFL rosters.)

NFL purists might complain about the players' fictional



NFL purists might complain about the players' fictional names, but that's a short-sighted criticism. Because of *FPSF*'s career capabilities, teams are constantly evolving. Regardless of how much you love this season's team, you won't be leading the same guys when you take the field next year. And five years down the road, you may have only a handful of those original players. So no matter how much you like having "Joe Montana" taking the snap, the guy's not going to play another ten seasons.

League and team management in *FPSF* is deep and absorbing. After each regular season game, you can check the roster for injuries. A player isn't merely listed as "injured" in *FPSF*; instead, you receive detailed reports on his condition, such as "bruised calf, questionable for three weeks." If a guy's listed as probable, you can play

him with only a little loss of effectiveness. Play him when he's listed as questionable, though, and you risk his serious injury.

FPSF generates an overwhelming variety of league reports. Statistical reports cover about every category imaginable, including league leaders in every major department. A player's performance is recorded by season and for his entire career. (Unfortunately, it's not possible to see individual game statistics *during* a game, a shortcoming which Dynamix ought to address in future versions.)

Before beginning a week's play, you can check the list of free agents that have left, or been released from, other teams. If your kicker's missed a couple of potentially game-winning field goals, put the bum to the reserve roster and sign a free agent.

FPSF automatically simulates league games not involving your team. When league games are played on "background," the games are re-created play by play rather than having the computer simply determine the final score and stats. Hardcore enthusiasts will appreciate that level of realism, and on a 486-33 it only takes about 30 minutes to resolve a week's worth of league games.

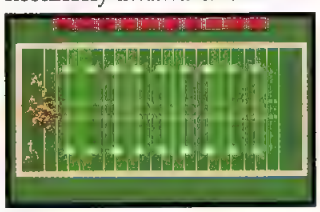
FPSF boasts the easiest play designer we've seen. Plays are diagrammed completely, with each player given blocking assignments, pass routes, and so on. When designing plays, you have control over several pre-snap options such as sending a player in motion, changing the formation, and altering the quarterback's snap count. Each defensive player can be told to key on a certain offensive player, and defenders in the secondary can be given man-to-man assignments or assigned individual areas to cover in a zone defense. In short, you dictate the roles and actions of every position in the play.

Say you'd rather edit existing plays than design them from scratch? You'll find plenty of material to work with — 32 playbooks containing some 200 plays. After you've tweaked a play to your liking, head out to the practice field to see if your strategy is successful. If your team has a shaky start, you can change playbooks at halftime in order to pursue a different strategy.

FPSF offers a choice of coach-only or arcade play at three levels. In the coaching mode, you can audible out of the play you've called (something Jim Harbaugh probably wouldn't recommend!), snap the ball, then watch the team carry out your play. In the standard arcade mode, the computer controls all players unless you take over. In the advanced arcade mode, you must control the quarterback on all passing plays, and the ball carrier at all times. Defensive control is limited to a select number of players, and you can switch to the defender closest to the ball once the play begins.

Arcade play is solid and enjoyable, but offers little to separate *FPSF* from other football games. One complaint: When viewing the action from behind the line of scrimmage, you can't see far enough downfield to anticipate where the defenders will be.

There are a few other annoying bugs and bumps we'd like to see smoothed out. It's needlessly awkward to set basic lineups; if you don't like the computer's choices, you have to alter the lineup for each individual play. On the field, there are far too many fumbles and far too few interceptions: In one of our simulated seasons, we saw the league's top-rated quarterback throw 34 touchdowns and *one* interception with a 74% completion rate.



The most obvious deficiency lies in the artificial intelligence of the computer opponent. Your opponent apparently can't tell time and doesn't know the score. Down a touchdown with a minute to play, he'll kick the field goal — every time. But Dynamix promises a quick fix to these problems, and hopefully these shortcomings will corrected by the time you read this.

Dynamix plans a series of Front Page Sports simulations, with baseball, basketball, and hockey games to follow — and we can't wait. With its many levels of sophisticated league simulation, *Front Page Sports: Football* is a powerful package that allows you to create a truly engrossing football world. If you love football, you've got the machine to run it, we've got two words for you — buy it.

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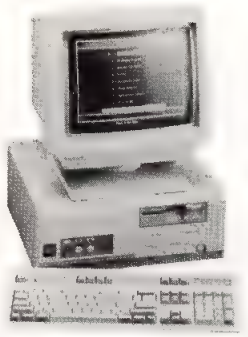

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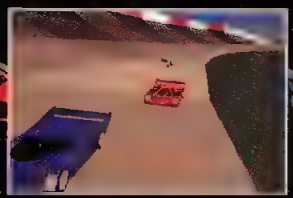

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CASTLES II: SIEGE & CONQUEST

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Category: Simulation/War Game

Publisher: Interplay

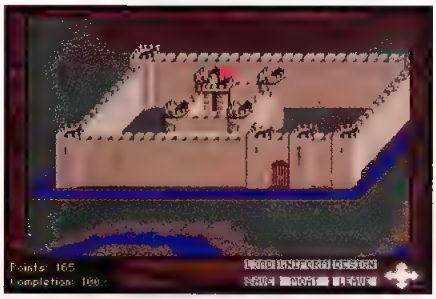
Developer: Interplay

Rating:

Like most gamers, we were favorably impressed when Interplay released *Castles*. It did what many programs strive for but seldom accomplish: it actualized a very powerful collective fantasy, and made the elements of that fantasy manipulable. The graphics were luscious, the little animated castle-building scenes utterly charming. But the game itself...well, that was a mite thin.

In their first add-on campaign disk, *The Northern Campaign*, Interplay did improve on a few of the weaknesses of the original game, particularly in the amount of control it gave the player over his army. But the basic game was still on the skimpy side — once you'd successfully erected and defended a few castles, that was it.

Now, in *Castles II*, the concept has finally been graced with a decent meat-and-potatoes strategy game, one which has a definite goal: for the player to become king of the entire mythical realm of Bretagne. There is only one path to the throne — create a powerful and secure empire by destroying or absorbing all rival claimants, and then obtain the backing of the Pope.



The kingdoms and rulers found in the game are based on those of 14th-century France at the start of the Hundred Years War, as are the economic systems and military apparatuses. There are four difficulty levels (we recommend starting on the easiest setting until you familiarize yourself with the game mechanics), and you have the option of playing with or without the incidental plot devices Interplay has liberally sprinkled throughout the game.

Castles II is a task-based game. You have a certain number of points to expend in the spheres of administration, politics, and war. You may assign tasks until your total number of points is used up, and the completion of those tasks runs independently of the game clock; i.e., there are no turns per se. As your experience and power increase, so does the number of expendable points at your disposal, and the more points you apply to a task, the quicker it gets done. The one task you'll probably order more than any other is "refine gold." Castles need maintenance, and unpaid soldiers seek work elsewhere.

Once you've committed your forces to attack a neighboring province, the game goes into its tactical mode. The miniatures-based battle scenes look and handle very much like those in *Centurion* and *Sword of the Samurai*, and this time out Interplay has made sure that you have full control over each element of your armies. Battles may be fought in either the open countryside or as siege operations. Attacking a castle, at least a finished one, requires heavy siege engines, which are available once you reach a certain level of prosperity.

As in both *Castles* and *The Northern Campaign*, the flow of events is often interrupted by routine crises and imploring visitors. One of the most imploring, and most obnoxious, is the messenger from the Pope, who will usually offer to grant you an indulgence for an outrageous sum of gold. Of course, if you pay the full amount you'll remain in high favor with the church, but after some haggling he'll usually be satisifed with about half of what he asks for.

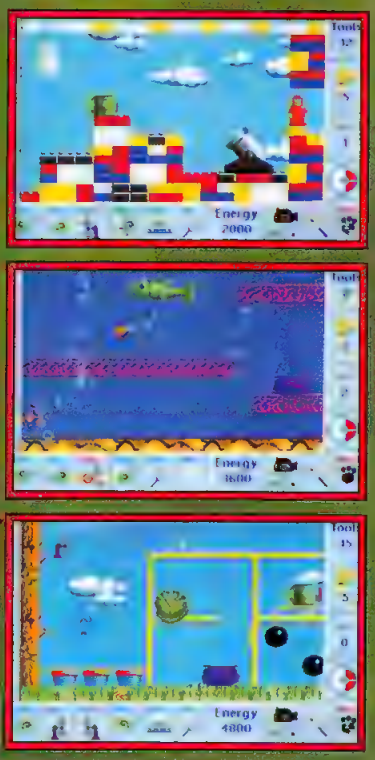
Naturally enough, castle-building is a key ingredient in the game. Aside from their defensive value and their worth as symbols of might and power,

castles keep the province they're located in from revolting against your rule. One thing you must not neglect: build your first castle in your home territory. If you don't, you may find yourself without a province early in the game, and the one you lose will usually be the one that has "gold" as its main resource. Once you're in that predicament, it's almost impossible to bootstrap yourself back to wealth and prosperity.

The pace of the game is sedate, thoughtful, and appropriately regal. The elements of kingship and combat are well-balanced, and once again the graphics are gorgeous (the use of digitized footage from *Alexander Nevsky* is especially classy). In short, *Castles II* is everything we hoped *Castles* would grow up to be.

GP

Creepers



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Product Information Number 260

MICROLEAGUE FOOTBALL 2

JEFF SEIKEN

Category: Sports

Publisher: MicroLeague Interactive Software

Developer: MicroLeague Interactive Software

Rating:

MicroLeague is well-known for steadily releasing upgraded versions of its sports simulations. Last summer saw the unveiling of *MicroLeague Baseball 4*, and now comes *MicroLeague Football 2* (which actually represents the company's third stab at a grid-iron game if you include version 1.5 in this count).

There's nothing wrong with sending a game that's begun to show its age back into the shop for some reconstructive surgery. But in the case of *MLF2*, MicroLeague appears to have done a slapdash job. The game has its good points: A comprehensive array of supporting utilities, including a stat compiler, schedule editor, and programmable coach. It also supplies a generous selection of great teams from the past, as well as all 28 NFL squads from the 1991 season. But even these positives don't cancel out its ill-designed interface and second-rate graphics.

You'd think an all-strategy football game like *MLF2* would lend itself perfectly to a point-and-click interface. Apparently, someone at Micro-League thought differently; except when using a utility function, everything must be entered with keystrokes. And though MicroLeague has provided two separate schemes for calling plays, neither of them works very well.

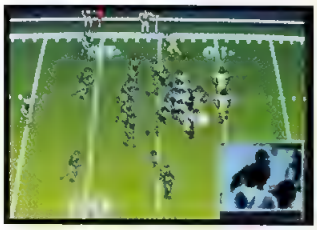
The first mode is by far the simpler — all you have to do is enter a number corresponding to one of the forty plays in your custom-designed playbook — but it sharply limits your choices. Forty plays don't offer a lot of variety, especially when you consider that formation and ball-carrier (or intended receiver) are a fixed part of the play. For instance, if you want the option of running the same halfback sweep off of three different formations, then you have to surrender three slots in your playbook.

The second method allows you to draw up plays on the fly using graphic menus. The problem here is that only four items are displayed at a time, which means you have to page back and forth through up to 15 different sets of menus (using a combination of three different keyboard commands) in order to create the play you want. While convoluted, this system would still be workable — if it weren't for the fact that you only have about 25 seconds to make your selection. Take longer than that, and you get slapped with a delay-of-game penalty.

The interface may be bad, but the visual aspects of the game border on the abysmal. *MLF2*'s much-touted use of live-action video amounts to little more than some stock footage of generic actions, like a quarterback taking a snap from the center. Worse, the video is applied almost indiscriminately. For instance, the same clip appears when a player is returning a kick-off, catching a punt, or calling for a fair catch.

The 3-D VGA graphics aren't much better. The lumpish-looking players lack any real definition, detail, or color, and their animated movements are more comical than convincing. When tackled, runners and receivers collapse with a sort of pratfall, while other players who have been knocked to the ground will simply lie there, stretched out on their backs as if unconscious. At the end of some plays, the field is likely to be strewn with so many bodies as to resemble a scene from the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. It's not a pretty sight.

The sad thing about all of this is that once you get past the miserable graphics and interface, you'll find that *MLF2* offers up some fairly satisfying foot-



ball. Its extensive statistical database produces realistic results, and its wide range of general manager functions makes it ideal for fans who want to stage a season replay or mix-and-match players and teams from different eras.

A few years ago, those qualities alone might have been sufficient reason to recommend *MLF2*. But today's market is now crowded with state-of-the-art games, all vying for the computer football crown. Faced with such strong competition, *MLF2* doesn't even qualify for a wildcard spot.

GP

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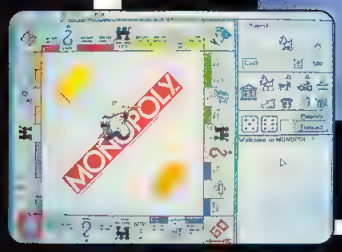

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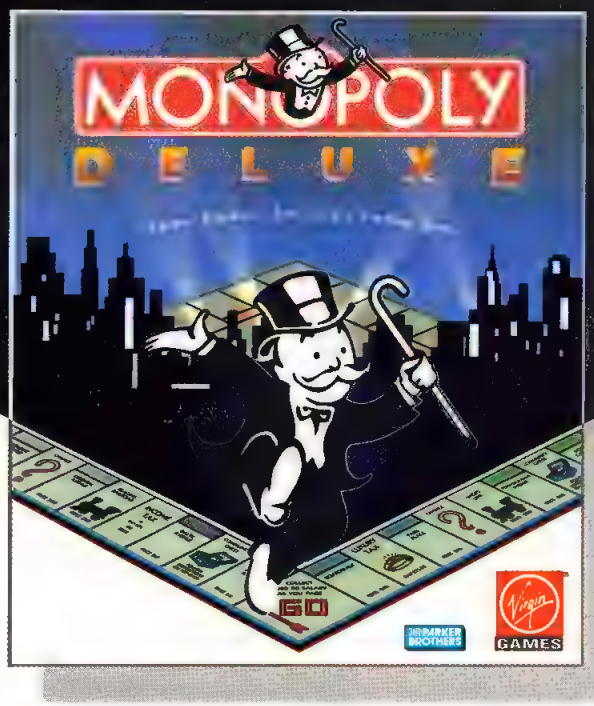

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Product Information Number 415

THE HUMANS

DAVID SEARS

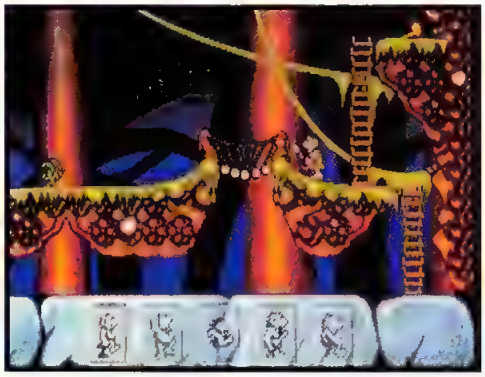
Category: Puzzle/Arcade

Publisher: Gametek

Developer: Imagitec

Rating:

If the fellows in this GameTek release are any indication, our prehistoric ancestors were a pretty slow-witted lot. Even lemmings have more on the ball than these ragged hide-wearers — a fitting comparison, since *The Humans* borrows heavily from the *Lemmings* tradition of tag-team platforming.



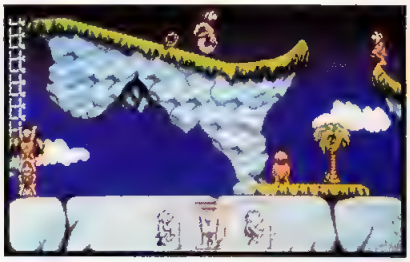
Lemmings fans will immediately recognize the concepts at work in *The Humans*. Working with a certain number of tribe members per level, you switch control between characters in order to perform necessary tasks before a time limit expires. These humans don't jump — an increasingly frequent deviation from platform games of the past — so they have to climb on one another's shoulders to reach the essential spear, or the torch that burns just out of reach. Tools, once in the possession of a human, can further aid in the evolutionary process. The spear assists in pole-vaulting over chasms, lava pools, and choppy water (humans can't swim yet); it's also quite useful in slaying dinosaurs.

Switching control between tribe members is a simple matter of pressing the appropriate function key, but as the timer counts down the last few seconds, keeping up with who's where can confuse even experienced players. Switch to a different human, and the screen scrolls effortlessly to center on the newly activated troglodyte.

These guys are much larger than lemmings, so much of the playfield for each level remains out of sight. You can expect some initial difficulties controlling your humans through the keyboard or combination of keyboard and joystick (there's no mouse support), but just as your onscreen relatives adapt, so will you.

Beating the clock is essential in *The Humans*, but a good stockpile of lives is equally important. And that's something of a sticky wicket: no matter how precise your timing, the humans have an annoying habit of falling short on critical leaps. As the poor clods plummet to their deaths time and time again, you'll be cursing under your breath. The password system (one for each level) ensures that you'll eventually finish the game, but not before you try some levels a dozen times or more. Anyone who loves the challenges associated with such games won't lose patience, but there's no doubt that patience is more in demand here than thought. On most levels, you'll quickly formulate a solution, then spend much of your time losing one human after another to indelicate accidents.

Occasionally the self-important witch doctor appears, providing items the tribe needs to complete a level. These items come at a price, however, and to earn the gods' favor, the shamen requires a human sacrifice — a grisly practice, but an effective one. Be sure to save enough humans, however, so your tribal population meets the minimums required to climb the evolutionary ladder.



The incidental music accompanying the human's trial by natural selection couldn't be finer. It's happy but not too whimsical, perfectly befitting a game so full of body splats and man-eating reptiles. Graphics run the gamut from the elegant introductory sequence to the sometimes not-so-funny interludes. (You can toggle these transitions off, along with the music.) Accessing previously played levels takes only a few seconds, aborting or restarting a game about the same.

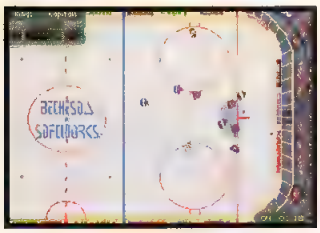
The animated humans move smoothly, and there are plenty of nice touches, such as the swaying of stacks of cooperative tribesmen. Backgrounds sometimes sport spot color cycling, but for the most part rank with the Mario Brothers' games in visual appeal. Taken all together, though, the sights and sounds of *The Humans* form the shell for a very playable game. And there's enough challenge in guiding these brainless neanderthals to keep most puzzle fans gaming for quite a while.

GP

WAYNE GRETZKY HOCKEY 3

NEIL RANDALL

Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3 arrived too late to be considered for one of *PC Entertainment*'s best of 1992 awards, but after playing *Gretzky 3* compulsively for several days I've got a sneaky feeling that it might already be a finalist for the 1993 award.



The first version of *Gretzky*, initially available for the Amiga, established itself as far and away the best hockey simulation ever designed for a computer: In fact, some reviewers (me, for instance) called it the best sports simulation, period. *Gretzky 2* improved on that first release, but its graphics were mediocre and the improvements weren't all very obvious (better artificial intelligence, for instance). As a result, *Gretzky 2* didn't get all that much attention. Now comes *Gretzky 3*, and suffice it to say that good things come to those who wait.

Wayne Gretzky Hockey is now a spectacular game. The AI has improved to the point that plays form realistically, with crisp passes from teammate to teammate setting up scoring chances at a variety of angles. The referee knows almost all of hockey's overly complex rules, including such obscurities as where the face-off occurs after a two-line offside call. Penalties are handled properly and effieciently — the game doesn't even sweat hard when there are four players sitting in the penalty box, each with an infraction called at a different time. This is something even dedicated hockey followers have trouble with.

But the first thing longtime *Gretzky* fans will notice is that now the game looks much, much better. While you can still play from the overhead view employed in the first two game, a new three-quarter view will almost certainly become the standard. This perspective shows 3-D players doing all the things real players do: leaning into curves, sliding to a stop, bracing for an body check, weaving around and between defencemen. (You will, however, need 512K of EMS to access the 3/4 view.)

After a goal, the scoreboard shows a digitized video of a scoring play. Also digitized are fight sequences and even the referee, who is shown making the correct motions for penalty calls. And *Gretzky 3*'s sound effects are superb as well: passes click from stick to stick, the puck pings off the goalpost, players thud into the boards and grunt when tripped to the ice.

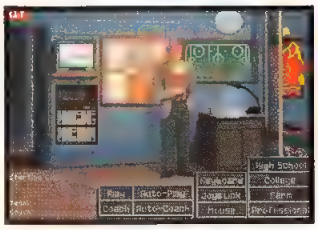
The computer can coach and play both home and visiting teams, in any combination, or you can match up against a human opponent. If you want to concentrate on playing, let the computer do the coaching for you; if you feel like calling the shots but not taking them out on the ice, then coach your team while the computer handles the on-ice action. You can do both, but being a player-coach is tough. In a two-player game, the players can handle different teams or play as teammates (one as coach, one as player, or both as players). And so on.

You can edit any team's lineup and any player's stats (the game is statistics-rich, although the effect of all the stats isn't apparent until you've tried a number of different teams). You can select who will play on each line for 5-on-5, 5-on-4, 5-on-3, 4-on-3, and 3-on-3 game situations (i.e., any variety of penalties). And you can edit the team's playbook using a clever and workable editing system.

Quibbles are few, and they'll probably be dealt with in future releases. Real P.A. announcers don't announce icings and offsides (or at least they shouldn't), the way they do in *Gretzky 3*. Icing occurs too frequently, similar to the unnaturally high number of line-drive outs to infielders in most baseball sims. The digitized goals, while stunning, are generic, and don't reflect the goal that was

scored (yes, this is difficult, but replays are handled much better in Sega's cart-based hockey game *NHLPA '93*). Finally, it would be nice to see a Bethesda *Hockey Simulator II* package built into *Gretzky* so you could play full schedules.

The bottom line? *Gretzky 3* is a great game *and* a great



simulation. Hockey fans all over the world — even those in such balmy locations as Tampa, Los Angeles, and San Diego — have a real reason to rejoice. If you want to play hockey on your PC, *Gretzky 3* is the only game in town.

GP

Category: Sports Simulation

Publisher: Bethesda Softworks

Developer: Bethesda Softworks

Rating:

NFL VIDEO PRO

GARY MEREDITH

Category: Sports

Publisher: Konami

Developer: Spirit of Discovery

Rating:

By the time you read this, NFL football will probably be the last thing on your mind. Basketball is nearing its seasonal crescendo, and most of the sports talk-shows are focused on the '93 baseball season. Still, there are more than a few out there who welcome year-round NFL football, and with Konami's *NFL Video Pro*, all you big fans — you know who you are — have one more way to ease those gridiron withdrawal pains.

If someone mentions football and your first thoughts are not of Jim Kelly or Lawrence Taylor, but of Pat Summerall and John Madden, then you'll feel right at home with *NFL Video Pro*. While most other football simulations attempt to recreate a true "live" football environment, with only a cursory nod to television, this game goes the whole nine yards into televised gridiron action. Central control for the game is the television studio. From here, you access not only your particular game, but all other games on the schedule being played that day. The focus isn't on a single game — instead, *NFL Video Pro* looks at the big picture of an NFL season.

All the statistics you could ever want, for teams or for individual players, are available to you. Also, you can modify the attributes of individual players to suit your own coaching philosophy.

NFL Video Pro is a strategy game only: Once you call a play, you have no control over any of the players. But you do have a wide range of play-calling choices, with 6 formations for both offense and defense, 12 plays for each formation, and 6 plays each for the offensive and defensive kicking game. Calling plays is simple — just click on the formation, then scroll through the available plays. For a true Sunday afternoon football experience, click on the "no huddle" option, kick back, and let the computer do all the playcalling (you can set parameters the computer will follow in picking plays).

While the statistical and strategic options are impressive, the game's biggest selling point — live-action video taken from NFL film archives, spliced together on the fly to show you the outcome of each play — is something of a disappointment. The default action screen is a small window where the video clip is displayed in rather murky monochrome. This is probably no handicap to anyone used to watching replays on those giant stadium monitors, but it will be a letdown for the great majority of fans who watch football on a 27-inch Zenith.

A further problem is that, no matter who's playing, the teams in the video clips always appear to be the San Diego Chargers — complete with a miraculously rejuvenated Dan Fouts — playing against the Los Angeles Raiders. Of course, computer video requires massive storage space, so it's understandable that Konami could not show each team. (As it is, the game requires about 18 megs for a normal installation.) Still, that doesn't change the fact that the footage quickly becomes tiresome, and that a little more variety would liven things up greatly. The huge amount of storage space needed for this sort of presentation also limits what plays are shown. For instance, you can set up in the shotgun, call a flea-flicker play, or try a fake punt, but you won't see these formations in the video clip.

There are two alternate views. The "Big TV" option lets you see the entire field, but the display is so small that the players — who literally look like two bunches of colored hyphens turned on end — are nearly microscopic. Ultimately you'll find this view only good for ascertaining relative field position. There's also an option to see the video footage on

a bigger screen, but the enlarged view is no more satisfying.

NFL Video Pro is a stat or strategy lover's delight, but falls short in delivering what it promises — a true pro football experience. The full realization of this concept will have to wait for faster CD-ROM drives and much better compression algorithms.

GP

DUNE II

T. LIAM MACDONALD

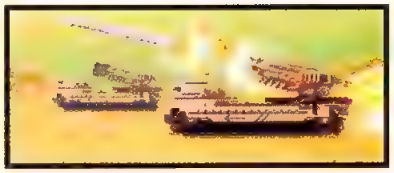
Category: Sci-Fi Strategy

Publisher: Virgin

Developer: Westwood Studios

Rating:

Real-time war games are often the bane of military strategy purists. Without systematically divided turns, there's frequently little time to plan anything resembling a coherent and logical strategy, and the result is often an odd hybrid of war game and frantic arcade action. But if a game has been designed well, the open-ended structure and constantly fluid nature of the real-time war game can make for some particularly exciting and entertaining play.



And that's the case with *Dune II* from Virgin. Westwood Studios, creators of *Eye of the Beholder* and *Legend of Kyrandia*, has forsaken the narrative framework of the first *Dune* game, opting instead to put all their prodigious talents into creating a very hot real-time science-fiction combat game.

Virgin's first *Dune* game offered a narrative adventure that was actually the shell for a global conquest strategy game. Though the original game delivered superb graphics, an interesting story, and a fun but not too complex strategy element, it was a slave to its narrative engine. The conquest of the planet always unfolded without variation, and there was too much repetition of story elements to get to the strategic meat of the game.

Westwood has smartly placed all of the narrative elements in a striking animated opening, complete with spoken narration, excellent music, and

the kind of state-of-the art graphics we've come to expect from this company. Far in the future, three Houses vie for control of the planet Arrakis, a desert planet also called Dune. Arrakis is rich in spice, a valuable material prized for its use in interstellar navigation. To increase spice mining, Emperor Frederick IV has offered governorship of Arrakis to the House which is able to produce the most spice. The edict throws the noble Atreides, the cunning Ordos, and the savage Harkonnen into a heated war for control of the spice fields. Each house wages ware differently, and to make matters more complicated, Frederick cannot be trusted, and may be secretly helping one of the houses gain an upper hand.

You have the option to play as any of the three Houses, using whatever special technology or military units are at that House's disposal. Each is subtly different: the Atreides have sonic tanks, the Ordos have saboteurs and battlefield missile launchers, and the Harkonnen have unguided ballistic missiles and powerful heavy tanks. Add to this the Emperor's elite Sardaukar troops -- which may join with any of your enemies at any time — and you have two highly unpredictable enemies.

The game proper is divided into nine scenarios. Each scenario allows the player to choose which of three territories to strike, and begins with a blank map, a factory unit, and a certain amount of spice credits. Credits are used to build mining facilities, power stations, factories and bunkers (for production of weapons and troops), silos, and over a dozen other facilities related to spice mining, technological research and development, and trading.

But your enemies start with the same resources, and waste no time in attacking. Simply put, the AI routine in *Dune II* is vicious and formidable. Wave upon wave of shock troops will batter your army and facilities, literally pounding you into dust in minutes if you haven't taken immediate steps toward military buildup. The subtleties of orthodox, phased war-game tactics mean nothing here: power — and lots of it — is the only key to victory.

The little touches Westwood has sprinkled throughout the game are brilliant and effective: mining vehicles roll over infantry with a satisfying *squish*, sandworms burrow under the sand and pop up to devour armor with no warning, vehicles leave little tracks in the sand that are slowly erased by the wind, and the crackling sound of communications from the field give the game an ambience that hooks you and keeps you hooked.

It might initially frustrate players accustomed to the leisurely pace of turn-based warfare, but there's no denying the fact that *Dune II* is crisp, fun, and very well-designed. If you're a military-tactics buff, this is one you'll want to add to your collection.

GP

CONQUEST OF JAPAN

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

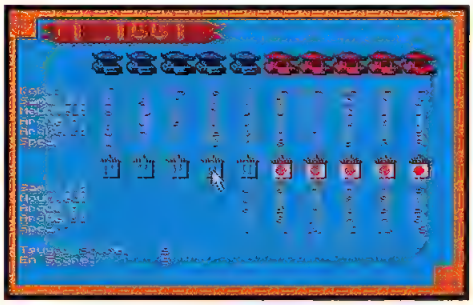
Category: Military Strategy

Publisher: Impressions

Developer: Impressions

Rating:

Impressions releases games that look like no one else's. The look is dictated by the system — called "Micro Miniatures" — which Impressions developed several years back when they were doing business as a U.K.-only company. In the Micro Miniatures system, you manipulate small tactical units,

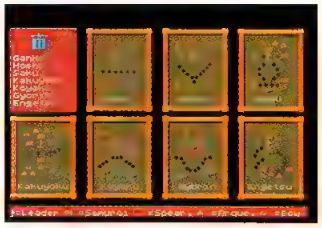


or individual warriors, that appear on the screen in full uniform. Each warrior stands on the field like a model soldier; each has its own intelligence routine, and will act in a reasonably logical manner without any human control. Should you want to take personal control, just click on the appropriate icon and you have literal command of each unit.

Conquest of Japan uses this system with more sophistication (and more success) than earlier Impressions games, a welcome sign that the company is continually refining and upgrading the concept. If you elect to view the battlefield with hi-res graphics (you need a 386 or 486 with local bus graphics capability), the action really looks plausible; if you view it in the closer, normal mode, the figures look a bit too blocky to create any true sense of realism. Casualties vanish from the screen instead of lying on the ground, there's no smoke when the arquebuses fire, and blood — which would serve to remind the player that there is a *battle* taking place — is conspicuously absent.

There are other problems beside these cosmetic ones that need to be worked out. For one thing, the animation is jerky and slow (setting the animation to "turbo" helps somewhat). And despite very real improvements in unit-control in comparison to earlier Impressions games, there is no provision for ordering your forces to stand fast on the defensive. Since excellent defensive terrain abounds on the game map — it's dotted with the sort of places where a force well-equipped with firelock muskets could hold out against a superior enemy — this seems an odd oversight.

These reservations aside, *Conquest of Japan* offers a solid strategy challenge. The objective is to conquer all of Honshu Island by defeating your sole rival for the title of shogun. Each warlord begins with five cities from which armies must be drawn. Normally you should leave defensive garrisons in any cities near the front line, with less-threatened cities supplying all able-bodied manpower. You can raise five separate armies, or merge two smaller forces into one extra-powerful corps with the "transfer troops" command. Authentic samurai battle formations are available for tactical consideration, but things can get pretty jumbled up once the battle actually starts, just as they would in real combat.



Controlling the game is easy and logical, the documentation is excellent, and for the most part the graphics leave little to be desired. *Conquest of Japan* marks quite an advance for the Micro Miniature system, and though that system has some way to go before it generates the kind of realism Impressions is striving for, it nevertheless makes for interesting, somewhat offbeat war games. Players who enjoyed *Lords of the Rising Sun* or *Sword of the Samurai* (or *Nobunaga's Ambition*, for that matter) should check out *Conquest of Japan*.

GP

CAR AND DRIVER

VINCE MATTHEWS

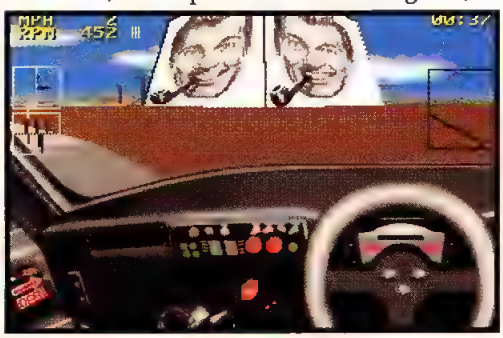
Category: Driving Simulation

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: Looking Glass

Rating:

Car and Driver offers a unique look at ten of the most exciting and intriguing cars in the world. It's no surprise that you'll find several of the exotic cars of choice, such as the Porsche 959, the Ferrari F40, the Lamborghini Countache, and the Lotus Esprit Turbo. But these gems can be found in other driving sims, and to *Car and Driver*'s credit it offers these and six more, including the Toyota MR2, Eagle Talon, and Corvette ZR1. All these cars can be had for $35,000 and under, but why even worry about price when you can test drive them here? Finally, there's the Mercedes C11 IMSA (engineered like no other car in the world), the '57 Ferrari 250 TR, and a true classic, the Shelby Cobra.



Car and Driver's main menu is laid out like the contents page of the magazine for which it was named, allowing you to access in-depth information on all ten cars and each track. The tracks include an assortment of real-life speedways and interstate highways, the Mahomet Drag Strip, and the San Dimas Mall parking lot. There are also two fictional tracks, the EA Speedway and Dobbs Speedway (styled after the fictional founder of the wacky Church of the Subgenius), as well as an "Autocross," much like you'd see at a sports car rally. Sadly, there's no stunt track, which might have provided a much-needed break from the monotony of the game.

To put it bluntly, *Car & Driver* falls short when compared to other driving and/or racing sims already on the market. Hardcore car enthusiasts may get excited over the technical specs and "biographies" included for each car, but the game's twitchy control and limited playing options are likely to turn off most players.

In the single-player game, all the races are time trials; the first time out on a track you're racing against the clock, the second time you're competing against a replay of the first time you finished the course. Beat your first time, and in the next race you'll go up against your *two* previous best races. It's nice to have other cars on the track, but of course you know exactly what they're going to do — after all, *you're* driving those cars. Much better is the two-player game, which can be played via modem, direct link, or on a network.

C&D's main problem, however, is that it just doesn't convey a true sense of speed. The animation, though smooth, is uninspiring; compared to a game like Broderbund's *Stunts*, in which the screen shakes whenever you near top speed, *C&D* is almost lackluster.

Controlling your car is something of a challenge as well. Burning rubber around the generic "Oval Speedway" was no problem, but many of our editors had a surprising amount of trouble just taking a leisurely drive down a highway, let alone tackling Monterey or the EA speedway.

Driving is something most of us do every day — we may not go 140 m.p.h. in a Lamborghini, but it's still something that nearly all of us are accustomed to. Unless a driving sim lets you do something you'd never get to do in real life — like racing against a full field of drivers, or pull off some breathtaking stunt — and then follows through with manageable controls and evocative animation, it's not likely to hold your attention for very long. *Car & Driver* may give you a chance to "drive" some of the world's fanciest cars, but after a few laps around each uneventful track, you'll probably feel about as stimulated as when you drive your Chevy to work.

GP

COMANCHE: MAXIMUM OVERKILL

BERNIE YEE

Category: Simulation

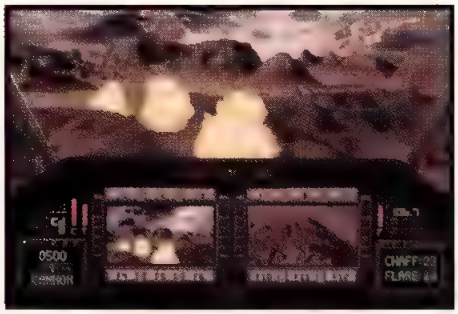
Publisher: NovaLogic

Developer: NovaLogic

Rating:

Back in 1990, a relatively small developer named NovaLogic created *Wolfpack*, still one of the finest WWII submarine simulations available. With the release of *Comanche: Maximum Overkill*, NovaLogic has worked its magic once again.

Much as *Ultima Underworld* set a new graphics standard for FRPs, *Comanche: Maximum Overkill* is going to



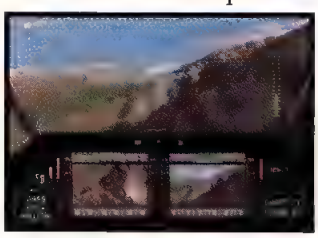
change the way gamers judge terrain graphics in every new airborne sim for some time to come. In the process, *Comanche* has also stolen some of the thunder from Origin's much-delayed *Strike Commander*, which promises similar terrain graphics. *Strike Commander* will have more ground objects, and perhaps will feature a more fully developed engine and game system, but *Comanche* will be remembered as the one who got there first—and got it right.

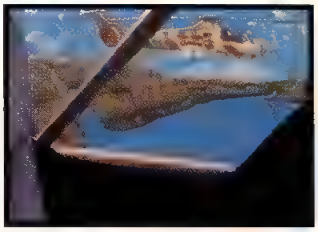
Like Electronic Arts's earlier *LHX Attack Chopper*, *Comanche* puts you in the cockpit of a helicopter in the not-too-distant future. Based on an actual proposed helicopter design, the Comanche is a fast, maneuverable scout machine with plenty of teeth and high battlefield survivability. Your weapons choices are straightforward; fire-and-forget or dumb munitions can be installed depending on your mission goals.

I found learning to fly *Comanche* amazingly easy—the flight mechanics are simple, and mastering the controls is no problem—and spent many of my first few hours with the program just flying around, admiring the dazzling terrain. But when I got into combat I discovered that *Comanche* is a mixed breed, with more arcade than simulation blood running through its veins. Any game with such a quick learning curve is sure to turn off the hardcore sim crowd, but *Comanche* delivers a visual thrill that even the most dedicated flight-sim fanatic has to appreciate.

Thanks to a graphics technology dubbed Voxel Space, Novalogic has increased polygon (the shapes that define the landscape) resolution by a factor of 500, so the terrain looks more contoured and realistic than anything you've ever seen on a PC—and there's no sacrifice in speed.

The ground maps, based on actual terrain models provided by the military, come alive in a way that was formerly reserved for demos: the sense of movement in *Comanche* will mesmerize even the most jaded gamer. You can actually fly in and out of ravines, watching the clever ground forces run for cover in hard-to-blast crevices in the landscape. All this has been accomplished





through 32-bit code programming, which fully utilizes the power of 32-bit processors. As a result, memory managers must be disabled and a minimal, "vanilla" boot sequence is required.

Of course, it would be like shooting fish in a barrel if all you faced were tanks and SAM installations...well, fish that fire back, anyway. You'll confront your share of airborne enemies as well, but you'll have Comanche wingmen to watch your six when you're occupied with more pressing matters, like the Soviet...er, Russian-made attack chopper launching those heat-seeking air-to-air missiles.

Comanche does have its flaws. The bitmapped images of objects such as other helicopters aren't nearly as impressive as the terrain. There are far too few missions, so a particularly captivated and dexterous gamer can finish the game in two or three days. And there's no real plot to speak of, an addition which would have made this arcadish simulation more entrancing. But NovaLogic does promise a series of mission disks that will extend your flight plan into the future—the true theater of operations for a game this technologically advanced.

Let's face it: simple little polygon landscapes won't do anymore, not after we've seen the level of realism that can be achieved with today's PC graphics. Visually, *Comanche: Maximum Overkill* is the closest thing to an official military training simulation that you can play, at least until the next generation of hardware comes along.

GP

MICROLEAGUE ACTION SPORTS SOCCER

BILLY MOON

Category: Sports

Publisher: MicroLeague Interactive

Developer: Krisalis Software

Rating:

For most sports games, the inclusion of real teams adds to the excitement. After all, it's more fun to control the same bunch of guys you see on television rather than a roster full of pseudonyms. But since soccer hasn't managed to achieve the same sort of following in this country as sports like football, basketball, or even tennis, the use of actual European clubs and players in *Action Sports Soccer* serves more as an introduction to the world of professional "football" than an attempt to capitalize on its popularity.

There are more than 170 actual soccer teams featured in the game, each with its corresponding real-life lineup. Apparently, everything is accurate right down to the team insignias featured on the title screen for each match. A few hours spent playing the game will probably give you a better conversational knowledge of the sport than most Americans will achieve in a lifetime.

As an actual game, though, *Action Sports Soccer* suffers from an identity crisis. Despite the bright red and yellow "Arcade-Style Excitement" blurb on the front cover, more of the game seems to be devoted to planning and statistics than actual playing. Before each game, you (and an optional second player) determine the playing formation of the team, and set the skill level and player for each position. To aid in player selection, you have access to each player's stats for the whole season. Each team can be controlled by either a human player or the computer. Choosing computer control for both teams allows you to simply view the game without participating. There's even a pure simulation mode that allows you to skip the action sequences altogether.

Of course, there's absolutely nothing wrong with a purely strategic sports simulation, but your managerial control in *Action Sports Soccer* isn't thorough enough to keep it interesting for very long. Although you do have a set of statistics for each player, the choice of stats seems a bit odd: There are five separate categories regarding fouls and violations, but only a single category for skill level. This provides a pretty good indication of how good a particular player is at the overall game, but offers no way of determining individual abilities such as dribbling, passing, and scoring which help you decide the best position for that player. There's also an annoying lack of coaching functions during actual game play. Your only real option in this area is to make player substitutions, and you have to be playing in arcade mode to do even that much.

As an action game, *Action Sports Soccer* is fun, but rough around the edges in several areas. The graphics, though not state-of-the-art, are good enough to bring the action to life. Unfortunately, the Ad Lib soundtrack disappears when the action game starts, leaving

only archaic crowd noises and the sound of coaches' whistles drifting out of the internal speaker. I also didn't like the fact that you have no choice over which player you control (it's always the guy closest to the ball), and that you can't control your goalie. And because of some strange selections, keyboard control is highly awkward — a joystick is pretty much essential.

No single part of this game is going to win any awards on its own, but the combination of action and simulation make *Action Sports Soccer* interesting, especially for true soccer fans. With a couple of additions and enhancements in sound and managerial control, *Action Sports Soccer* would take a big step toward becoming a premiere soccer game for PCs.

GP

ATAC: THE SECRET WAR AGAINST DRUGS

GARY MEREDITH

Category: Simulation/War Game

Publisher: MicroProse

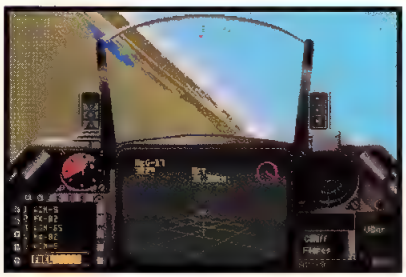
Developer: Argonaut Software

Rating:

With the end of the Cold War making NATO-Warsaw Pact scenarios less believable, simulation and war-game designers have begun to focus on limited conflicts overseas or, as with this MicroProse release, on covert operations dervied from foreign and domestic policy.

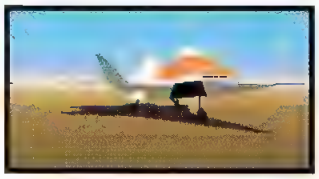
The political implications of an actual, undeclared shooting war on drug cartels, replete with attack copters and the latest in fighter aircraft technology, are best left for forums like "The McLaughlin Group." The battleground in *ATAC: The Secret War Against Drugs* is Colombia, a sovereign nation, and despite the implied U.N. sanctioning of the war against drugs — the scenario takes place in 2003 — some may still find certain aspects of the game's politics a little hard to swallow.

In *ATAC*, you are the commander of an elite military group, equipped with AH-64 Apache attack helicopters and



the F-22, winner of the advanced tactical fighter competition held by the U.S. Air Force. You can jump into the thick of combat right away, but you'll soon discover that this is more than simply an air-combat simulator.

If you've ever flown a MicroProse flight simulation before — and there can't be many flight-sim fans out there who haven't — everything here will seem very familiar. Keyboard commands are pretty much standard MicroProse fare, and both aircraft fly with the smoothness we've come to expect from a company founded by a fighter pilot. A few commands have been changed in the F-22, especially in targeting, to reflect the sophisticated nature of the new plane's combat technology. And in the Apache you have to worry about juggling the collective and cyclic pitch controls.



Neither craft seems overly sensitive to control input; to some, the Apache might even seem a bit insensitive. Supposedly this emulates the control response of a real chopper, but MicroProse may have deadened the controls a little *too* much. Accuracy is undoubtedly important in a simulator, but not at the expense of playability.

Once you choose your craft, give careful thought to its armament. Early on, when you're shooting at single targets, you don't have to worry too much about what you carry. Usually a mix of Sidewinders and Hellfires will do the job. Later on, when you're more involved with strategic decisions, you'll want to be more circumspect about how you outfit your aircraft. A load of Sidewinders won't do you much good against hardened ground emplacements.

After you've gotten a feel for your mount and have experimented with the effects of your varied arsenal, you can move to the next level, where you battle a single drug lord. Succeed in that mission and you're placed at the head of an entire campaign against a cartel of drug lords.

It's with these two levels that the game avoids being just another air-combat simulator. You'll find it's not enough to be a great pilot; you must also develop your strategy as a commander to interdict the drug runners and to gain air superiority over the drug lords' avenues of commerce. With your limited force, you must exercise a great deal of judgment over the allocation of your combat resources. And knowing when to hit a target is as important as what the target is. As a commander, you can no longer take on every mission yourself. Fortunately, your force is a good one, and gets better as it gains more experience. That's important, because the drug lord forces get better too, and if you're not good enough, they'll eventually hunt you down and destroy your secret base.

Political reservations aside, *ATAC: The Secret War Against Drugs* is a very good flight simulator and war game. It especially shines in the subtleties of war gaming, with plenty of parameters for you to manipulate in order to create some surprisingly complex scenarios. On the simulator side, the game is typical MicroProse fare, although the limited number of aircraft to fly and the rather average flight graphics may disappoint some. Whatever your leanings, you'll find *ATAC: The Secret War Against Drugs* well worth the purchase price.

GP

THE ISLAND OF DR. BRAIN

LESLIE MIZELL

Category: Puzzle

Publisher: Sierra

Developer: Sierra

Rating:

The Castle of Dr. Brain was a really good game. It was fun to play, and if you learned a few things in the process, the Sierra designers had done their job. *The Island of Dr. Brain*, on the other hand, is a *great* game. It's exactly what a sequel should be, retaining all the best aspects of its predecessor while improving on the shortcomings.

In both *Dr. Brain* games, you're sent on errands by the eccentric, brilliant Dr. Brain. You earned a job as lab assistant in *Castle of Dr. Brain*, and in *Island* you're on your first assignment in your new position, recovering a battery hidden in the core of Dr. Brain's island hideaway. But in both cases, the plot is merely a framework for a variety of brain-teasers, ranging from easy hidden-word puzzles to connecting complex circuitry.

As in the first game, there are novice, standard, and expert skill levels in *Island of Dr. Brain*. The puzzle type remains the same no matter what the skill level, but its complexity or length changes to suit players of practically any age (though the game is best suited for players 12 and up). Dr. Brain has given you a "hint watch"; if you run into trouble, he gives you a push in the right direction — but in expert mode, it's little more than a jostle.

The primary improvement in *Island of Dr. Brain* is that not only are the puzzles more educational, but also more fun. The first game's puzzles leaned toward math and science problems, with a few of what might be called "party favorites" tossed into the mix — sliding puzzles, mazes, hangman, and fill-in-the-punchline jokes. The second includes zoology, art appreciation, codebreaking, computer programming, grammar, chemistry, algebra, and music composition among its categories. When the instruction "encyclopedia" covers the Fibonacci sequence, the works of Stephen King, the difference between "amount" and "number," and the German word for "department store" ("warenhaus," of course), you know you've got some learnin' to do.

But *Island* really does make knowledge fun, and for every puzzle that takes some concentration — such as the genealogy experiment or the microchip scanner — there are lots more that you'll want to play several times (the chemical spectrum analyzer is a particular favorite).

The original *Dr. Brain* was enjoyable on every skill level, but once you'd played through three times, you had pretty much seen it all. *Island* has a much greater replay value; although many of the puzzles, such as the jigsaw, remain basically the same, other puzzles are different every time you play. For example, a categorizing game may first deal with brass, string, and percussion instruments, then cover planets, constellations, and stars the next time around. There's also a back-up option that allows you to revisit rooms or puzzles as many times as you want, and you often earn a couple of extra points by doing so.

The Island of Dr. Brain is a perfect game for kids and their parents who enjoy free-form learning coupled with rich graphics and smooth game play. Greater variety and more solid educational value make *The Island of Dr. Brain* what all sequels should be — better games than their predecessors.

GP

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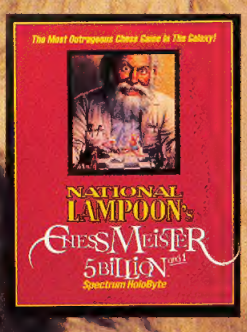

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